

RUMORS OF AN ASTEROID

a play by Tom Baum

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Valerie, early 50s, an actress

Dawn, mid-20s, Valerie's assistant (male)

Kendra, late 20s, Valerie's daughter, a social worker

Haskell, early 20s, Valerie's son, a UFO blogger

Ned, mid-50s, Valerie's ex-husband, a business manager

Jason, early 30s, Kendra's boyfriend, a photographer

Rawley, early 60s, Kendra's suitor, an investment banker

Blanca, 30s, a nurse

Act I. The family room in Valerie's house/Valerie's veranda

Act II. A hospital room/A hospital waiting area. The next day.

The time is the present

ACT I

(The stage is split between two non-adjacent spaces. Right, several chairs and a couch suggest a family room. A single door opens on an unseen hallway. A tall window looks out on an unseen garden. Left, a low wall, some white wicker, and a sliding door suggest a veranda.

On the veranda, VALERIE is lying on a massage table under a towel. DAWN is working on her. Massage music plays on a boombox.)

VALERIE: It was a perfectly horrible meeting! Not a senior rep in sight. Three little squeaky-voiced robots with hideous names— Park, Lex, Madison, whatever. Not one of them knew who I was. *(mimicking)* “We’d like to get you the cover of *More*.”

DAWN: Isn’t that like the kiss of death?

VALERIE: Absolutely. Next stop, the *AARP Journal*.

DAWN: So what did they say to that?

VALERIE: Same thing my ex is always telling me. “We’re in trouble, Valerie.” It’s always “we” with Ned. “We have to move soon, Valerie, you’re being dropped by your charity.”

DAWN: Is that even true? You can turn over now.

VALERIE: *(turning over)* Last time I looked, Glenn was doing all my lupus appearances. She’s been on *More*, so maybe there’s hope. Jason’s coming today to take my picture.

DAWN: Kendra’s Jason? Could be awkward.

VALERIE: Don’t call him that, that’s over. Kendra moved out long ago. .

DAWN: Friends with benefits, dear.

VALERIE: Oh I don't think so, Kendra would have told me. Who else am I going to get? Jason will work for nothing, and that's only because he adores me. And if I can't get a cover shot out of this, at least we'll have pictures of my birthday party.

DAWN: You know, you told me once you were a Libra.

VALERIE: I am a Libra.

DAWN: Please. If today's anywhere near your birthday, you're a Virgo.

VALERIE: When we changed my birth year, we also changed the month. More convincing that way. Turn off that music, it sounds like Carrie's about to leap from her grave.

(DAWN mutes the boombox, folds up the massage table.)

VALERIE: You see that house with the picture window? People used to invite friends over, just to watch me take a sunbath.

(VALERIE opens her robe.)

VALERIE: Hi, there! Anybody home?

DAWN: Um...speaking of full disclosure...Kate says she wants me to live in.

VALERIE: Oh God, I was afraid of this. Dawn, trust me--no flat-chested actress ever becomes a real star.

DAWN: She does if she has implants.

VALERIE: Kate's gotten implants? Oh, that's all I need to hear.

(A door slams.)

VALERIE: That must be Kendra. Is Haskell here?

DAWN: *(where else?)* Uh, yeah. He's in his room.

VALERIE: Would you warn him about the party? Tell him no strangers are coming. Make a big point of that. *(glancing around)* Look at this furniture. White wicker is so over.

(Lights down on the veranda as VALERIE and DAWN exit. Lights up on the family room as KENDRA enters, carrying a gift bag. She's on a cell.)

KENDRA: *(into phone)* Hi, Rawley, it's me again. Forgot to warn you —if you're coming from the south, be sure and take the first right north of Vicente. I'll see you soon.

(VALERIE enters the family room.)

VALERIE: Here she is, punctual as ever! Oh sweetheart, I said no gifts. Must be a regift, you can't afford possibly Harari. But thank you, dear. Now before I forget: There's a woman in my book group, she runs a spa here on the West Side, she asked me are you happy at that halfway house. I said are you kidding, she's miserable, she's in a deep deep rut, all she does is run errands for the homeless. Would you like to meet this woman? She's dying to meet you.

KENDRA: You want me to work at a spa.

VALERIE: Don't get testy, they offer psychotherapy too. I hear the therapists get \$600 an hour for some kind of interview, what do they call it, some horrible jargon, it's very chic right now...

KENDRA: Attachment interview?

VALERIE: That's the one. Could be very lucrative, darling. Help us save up for that clinic you've been fantasizing about.

KENDRA: I'd rather take my life.

VALERIE: What life. Jason was your life. I'd give anything to get you back together.

KENDRA: Why, so you can flash him again?

VALERIE: I was taking a sunbath! He came onto the veranda!

KENDRA: You invited him to join you! You asked him to make you a mojito.

VALERIE: Never. You're making that up.

KENDRA: I'm not making it up! It happened! And for your information, the clinic's way more than a fantasy!

VALERIE: Really. You must know something I don't.

KENDRA: It's what keeps me going, all right? So please don't be so dismissive.

VALERIE: I'm not being dismissive, I'm just being realistic. Hello, Haskell.

(HASKELL *has entered with DAWN. HASKELL's in pajama bottoms, plain white T-shirt, and flip-flops. He's carrying a laptop—a constant companion.*)

VALERIE: Is this how you dress for my birthday party?

HASKELL: I thought your birthday was in August.

VALERIE: No, that's my on-line birthday. Dawn sent you an e-vite, I'm sure he did. (*to KENDRA*) He lives right down the hall, we only communicate electronically.

HASKELL: She knows that, Mom.

DAWN: Haskell got 2400 hits on his blog today.

KENDRA: Why so many?

HASKELL: The rumors.

VALERIE: What rumors, dear?

HASKELL: About the NASA cover-up.

VALERIE: Don't make me pull teeth, what's NASA covering up?

HASKELL: The asteroid collision.

VALERIE: When did this happen?

HASKELL: It hasn't happened yet.

VALERIE: Yet?

KENDRA: No wonder my clients were going haywire. (*to HASKELL*)
What do you tell your readers? I hope you tell them not to stress?

HASKELL: I just give them the science.

VALERIE: And what is the science?

HASKELL: A lot of people are saying it's a wandering black hole.
But that's so retarded. Earth's orbit would have been perturbed by
now.

DAWN: Ohmigod. So you're saying these rumors could be true?

HASKELL: Meteorites collide with Earth every day. We just don't

hear about them.

DAWN: Wouldn't the White House call a press conference? If they saw a big one coming?

HASKELL: Not till they decided how to deal with it.

VALERIE: Haskell, now you are scaring us. How worried should we be?

HASKELL: That's up to you. I can't control your thoughts.

(NED has entered, in a sports jacket and rocker T-shirt, gift in hand.)

NED: Scaring us about what? Happy birthday, Valerie. Hello, Kendra. Dawn. *(to HASKELL)* Hey, buddy.

VALERIE: Thank you, Ned. Haskell, your father said hello.

(HASKELL, buried in his laptop, doesn't answer.)

VALERIE: He's busy with his blog. Haskell got 2400 hits today.

NED: 2400? Is that good?

VALERIE: Haskell, he asked you a question, is that a lot of hits?.

HASKELL: Yes, it's a lot of hits. Asteroid rumors are the biggest hit-generators.

NED: Right, I heard something about that on NPR. You're onto that nonsense, huh? Good job, buddy.

DAWN: Haskell doesn't think it's nonsense. Do you, Haskell?

HASKELL: I don't judge. I only report.

NED: Well, I'm judging, and I say it's bullshit. Hey, look who I ran into outside.

(JASON enters, casually dressed, carrying a camera bag. VALERIE hugs him.)

VALERIE: Jason, sweetheart! Thank you so much for coming!

JASON: How are you, Valerie?

VALERIE: I'm fantastic. Look at you. Cuter than ever. Kendra, it's Jason.

KENDRA: So I see. Hello, Jason.

JASON: Hello, Kendra. You're surprised to see me.

KENDRA: Surprised is not the word.

NED: I'm sensing something here. I thought you and Kendra—

KENDRA: We're not.

JASON: We're not.

VALERIE: Not for ages, Ned.

NED: What happened?

VALERIE: Yes, I thought you parted friends.

KENDRA: Yes, but that doesn't mean we—

JASON: It doesn't mean we are friends.

KENDRA: We've hardly spoken to each other.

JASON: We never speak.

VALERIE: *(to DAWN)* You see? I was right. *(to JASON)* You're here now. What's the problem?

JASON: Yes, what is the problem?

KENDRA: I've asked someone to drop by today.

VALERIE: Really? Who? Someone from the clinic? A co-worker?

KENDRA: He's not a co-worker, no. I'm going to get myself a drink.

VALERIE: He's still welcome! Don't disinvite him!

(KENDRA exits. JASON is looking a little stunned.)

DAWN: *(slyly)* Something wrong, Jason?

JASON: Nothing's wrong. Excuse me, I left some stuff in the car.

(JASON *exits.*)

VALERIE: (*to NED*) Well, that's an encouraging development, isn't it? She's actually met someone new. Do you think it's serious, is that why Jason got upset? Why am I asking you, you never know anything that's going on. Dawn, get me a Jameson's. Two fingers, no ice.

NED: Double that for me. Why did Kendra and Jason split up?

DAWN: Don't look at me. I think they're still an item.

VALERIE: Please, why would they lie about it? Jason lost his *Times* job, and on what Kendra's making, they couldn't afford an apartment big enough for two. End of story.

DAWN: (*exiting*) If you say so. I'll get the drinks.

(DAWN *exits.*)

NED: Listen, those poor kids aren't alone. We're all feeling the pinch. (*to HASKELL*) So buddy, any ads on your blog?

HASKELL: Not yet.

NED: So it's not actually making you any money.

HASKELL: That doesn't mean it's bad.

VALERIE: He wasn't implying that, darling.

HASKELL: Oh yes he was.

VALERIE: Then that was rude of him. Don't you remember, Ned, if a commercial came on the radio? Haskell would shut his eyes, stick his fingers in his ears, and go la la la la until it was over.

NED: Yeah, I remember. How many hits would you need for ads?

HASKELL: At least 20,000 a week.

NED: Let's hope this asteroid crap has legs. You might just save your mother's life.

HASKELL: If we're all going to die, what difference does that make.

(HASKELL *claps his laptop shut and exits.*)

NED: What did he mean, “if we’re all going to die.” He doesn’t really believe these rumors, does he?

VALERIE: I never know what Haskell believes. And I’ve told you not to call him “buddy.”

NED: I’ve always called him buddy. Since he was in diapers.

VALERIE: It’s grotesque. Haskell is nobody’s buddy and never will be, bless his sweet little heart. Did you go over the books?

NED: Yes. We’re in the deepest possible shit.

VALERIE: Yes yes, I know, I’m asking for specifics.

NED: I have a call in to the Home Shopping Network about your perfume.

VALERIE: I’ll sell my body first.

NED: The Home Shopping Network is a better bet. That’s what your fan base has shrunk to. And you’re definitely going to have to let Dawn go.

VALERIE: What, and have him work for Kate? Never. Not a chance. If I lose Dawn to another actress, a younger actress, don’t you see, that just greases the slippery slope.

NED: That’s the slope this family’s on. Did you mention the spa job to Kendra?

VALERIE: Yes, and she spit it back in my face. All she can think about is this clinic fantasy of hers.

NED: Oh God, what clinic fantasy?

VALERIE: Some rainbow coalition of the batty and the battered. I’ve given her all the help I can. I suppose this means my trip to Italy is off?

NED: That trip and every other trip.

VALERIE: Oh Lord. Ned, do you realize I’m the only person I know who’s never been to Florence?

NED: Yeah, because you live in a Hollywood Ivory Tower. If you’d gotten out more, maybe your craft wouldn’t have suffered.

VALERIE: My craft!

NED: And the phones would still be ringing.

VALERIE: What the hell do you know about my craft!

NED: How can you say that? After all the help I gave you?

VALERIE: Oh please. I was a star before we met!

NED: A child star. Without me, you would have frozen with the first taste of fame. “Oh, you love me like this? Then I’ll stay like this the rest of my life.” Those little noises you used to make, when you couldn’t put a speech across. The little twitches to signal deep emotion. Toying with you hair whenever the camera was in your face. I broke you of those habits, I taught you more than any director ever did, and this is the thanks I get—total amnesia. You listened to me, Val, you learned from me, you took my advice about everything—and you’d damn well better heed me now. It’s the Home Shopping Network or the Motion Picture Home—take your pick.

VALERIE: God help me. If only the sky would fall.

(Lights down on the family room. Lights up on the veranda as KENDRA enters, talking on her cell.)

KENDRA: Hi, Rawley, same message. And p.s....the vipers are already hissing...Don’t say you weren’t warned.

(JASON enters, carrying a portfolio.)

JASON: So this guy Rawley’s coming, huh?

KENDRA: Yes, and I specifically asked you not to show up, didn’t I?

JASON: I wanted to check out the competition.

KENDRA: He’s not your competition, OK? Stop saying that.

JASON: What does that mean? He’s not as good in the sack?

KENDRA: Jason, for the last time, I haven’t been to bed with him. I didn’t even hear from him for three months.

JASON: And now he’s back. And suddenly he wants to meet the family.

KENDRA: What was I going to say, no? He's not interested in me, Jason, he's interested in funding my clinic.

JASON: Yeah, sure. That's why he was wining and dining you every single week. If it was all so platonic, how come you've never mentioned us?

KENDRA: Jason, why burst his bubble when he's about to take out his checkbook? Oh God, I can't believe I said that. Seriously, why didn't you warn me you were coming?

JASON: Because you would have talked me out of it. How was your day?

KENDRA: Horrible. Thanks to my brother, half my clients think the world is ending. And oh God, my supervisor, I could kill her. I spent two hours replacing a lost ID, another two hours chauffeuring a tranny to her orthodontist, I had to find an apartment for this guy who I thought he could afford more than a shithole, turns out he's broke as well as bipolar, what's the last time I did any therapy? How can I even call myself a therapist? I'm more like a real estate broker. Seriously. That's what I'm doing half the time. Finding apartments for homeless people.

JASON: Well, you won't have to put up with that much longer. If Rawley's about to come across. You've shown him the actual proposal?

KENDRA: I gave it to him last night. As we were leaving the restaurant. That's when he asked to meet, you know—

JASON: Your mom.

KENDRA: Not just my mom. Everybody.

JASON: Except me. My name never came up.

KENDRA: Why would your name come up? Ohmigod, don't tell me you brought your portfolio.

JASON: You said he collects.

(JASON hands her a batch of photographs.)

KENDRA: Ohmigod, wasn't I naked when you took this?

JASON: Yeah, I cropped out your body. So he won't get suspicious.

KENDRA: Trust me, you won't put anything past this man. I'll show him your photographs, all in good time, just let me make the overtures, OK, sweetheart?

(VALERIE breezes onto the veranda, dressed for the photo shoot in a cocktail dress.)

VALERIE: Oh, hello you two. Glad to see you getting along again. Jason, for my cover pictures—Dawn suggested the garden. I'm counting on you to take off ten pounds at least. (*sees photos*) Are these yours? Oh, this is so lovely of Kendra.

(*The doorbell rings.*)

VALERIE: Dawn, can you get that? (*to KENDRA*) That must be your new friend. Come, dears.

(VALERIE exits the veranda. JASON and KENDRA hang back.)

KENDRA: He's this close to giving me the funding. I'm been dreaming of this for years. Please don't blow it for me.

(KENDRA kisses JASON. *Lights down on the veranda as they exit.*)

Lights up on the family room as RAWLEY enters with DAWN. He cuts a prosperous figure in blazer and slacks. He's at least two decades older than KENDRA.

VALERIE enters the family room.)

VALERIE: Well, hello there. I'm Kendra's mom.

RAWLEY: Of course you are. Delighted to meet you, Valerie. I'm Rawley.

VALERIE: And you've already met Dawn. (KENDRA and JASON enter.) And here's Kendra.

RAWLEY: Hi, Kendra.

VALERIE: And this is Kendra's old friend Jason.

(JASON stiffens at the sight of RAWLEY.)

RAWLEY: (*to JASON*) Nice to meet you, Jason.

JASON: Yeah, hi, same here.

RAWLEY: Something the matter?

JASON: No, I'm fine. You're...you're Rawley Bateson.

RAWLEY: That's right, have we met? I have a distinct feeling we have.

JASON: No, we've never actually met.

VALERIE: Jason's here to take pictures of the party.

RAWLEY: Oh right, how stupid of me. I left something in the car. Excuse me a moment. (*takes out cell*) Ezra, I left something on the back seat. Bring it to the front door, would you?

VALERIE: (*brightens*) Ezra's your driver?

RAWLEY: Yes, Ezra's my driver..

VALERIE: Please, Dawn will get it—what are you driving?

RAWLEY: A gray Bentley.

VALERIE: A gray Bentley! Please. Sit down. What will you have to drink, Rawley?

RAWLEY: Water, no ice, please. (*to DAWN*) Thank you, Dawn.

(*DAWN exits. RAWLEY sits down, a little slowly. NED enters with his drink and VALERIE's.*)

VALERIE: Now how do you know Kendra? You're not connected with the halfway house. Not homeless, obviously. Or psychotic.

RAWLEY: Not yet, God willing.

VALERIE: So you're what? Let me guess. I smell Wall Street. Yes?

RAWLEY: Spot on.

VALERIE: I'm rarely wrong. Oh, and speaking of finance, here's Ned. My ex-husband.

RAWLEY: Nice to meet you, Ned.

NED: It's good to see you again, Rawley.

RAWLEY: Sorry?

NED: Three years ago, at Bohemian Grove. You gave a talk on mutual-fund stagnation. Very impressive.

RAWLEY: I remember the talk, I can't say I remember you. (*to JASON*) But I'm positive I've seen you before. You're a photographer, aren't you? Didn't you have a show at Bergamot?

JASON: I haven't had a show yet.

RAWLEY: I know I've seen your face. Do you work for the *Times*?

JASON: I used to work for the *Times*.

RAWLEY: (*warily*) Is it possible you took my picture?

JASON: It's very possible, uh-huh.

RAWLEY: I'm sure it'll come to me.

(*DAWN enters with Rawley's gift, and his water.*)

RAWLEY: Thank you, Dawn.

DAWN: You're so welcome.

RAWLEY: Happy birthday, Valerie.

VALERIE: Oh my, how lovely. Listen to that, it rattles. Whatever could this be?

KENDRA: Dawn, just put it with the others...never mind.

(*VALERIE is already tearing it open. Inside is a box with VALERIE's face on the cover.*)

VALERIE: What is this? Oh my God, it's a jigsaw puzzle. With my face? A jigsaw puzzle with my face? Ned, did you authorize this? I wonder how well it's selling.

NED: It's not selling, Valerie.

VALERIE: What do you mean, it's not selling? He just bought one.

RAWLEY: I had the puzzle made. From a screen capture.

VALERIE: I have no idea what that is, but I'm desperately flattered. Wasn't that thoughtful of him, Kendra?

KENDRA: Beyond thoughtful.

VALERIE: Tell me, Rawley, do you live in Los Angeles?

RAWLEY: From time to time. My home base is Manhattan.

VALERIE: Really. And how did you and Kendra meet?

RAWLEY: Completely by chance. I was jogging one morning...in that park that overlooks the beach...and I saw this lovely young woman struggling with a homeless man. He was screaming at her, wasn't he, darling? I offered to help and ended up driving them both to the halfway house.

VALERIE: And what brings you to L.A. now?

RAWLEY: I have business here. But chiefly Kendra.

VALERIE: How charming. And how improbable.

KENDRA: What do you mean, improbable?

VALERIE: The way you and Rawley connected. What did you think I meant?

(HASKELL *enters, with his laptop.*)

VALERIE: And this is my son Haskell. Haskell, say hello to Rawley Bateson. (*no response*) Haskell's head is in the clouds today. His blog got 2400 visitors.

HASKELL: It's up to 5,000 now.

VALERIE: Isn't that amazing. In just a few minutes. And all because of these asteroid rumors, are you familiar with those, Rawley?

RAWLEY: I've heard a few reports. What's the name of your blog, Haskell?

HASKELL: UFOnut.com.

RAWLEY: So you're a believer?

HASKELL: In what, ETs? That's like asking do I believe in Ohm's Law. I guess you don't.

RAWLEY: On Ohm's Law I'm agnostic. Life on other worlds? Nothing easier to believe. But why do they always seem to land in rural areas?

HASKELL: You'd probably say because farmers are more gullible.

RAWLEY: No, or they'd have landed in West L.A.

VALERIE: (*immoderate laugh*) Oh, that's so funny! (*to KENDRA*)
He's adorable, isn't he.

HASKELL: It's a big myth about farmers. There are tons of urban sightings.

RAWLEY: So where are the ETs?

HASKELL: Oh right, Enrico Fermi's question. Stephen Hawking asked the same stupid question about time travelers. Why don't we ever run into them? Well, maybe they can see us but we can't see them, did these great geniuses ever think of that? A race that can navigate space-time, they can certainly bend light around their bodies and make themselves invisible.

RAWLEY: Invisible aliens. All around us. Watching us. Observing us.

HASKELL: And looking out for us.

RAWLEY: Yes. Like guardian angels. Maybe this asteroid is one of their spaceships?

HASKELL: That's one theory, yeah. Meteors are spaceships in disguise. What, you think that's crazy? It's not crazy. It's completely plausible. My readers know what can happen.

DAWN: He's getting more readers by the minute.

RAWLEY: Careful you don't get too popular. They'll charge you for the extra bandwidth.

HASKELL: You think I don't know about the extra charge?
You think I'm stupid about money? You think that runs in our family?

KENDRA: Haskell: you asked me to tell you when you're being rude? You're being rude.

HASKELL: I'm so sick of having this discussion. It's completely retarded. You know what worries me about the asteroid rumors? That you aren't worried. And that means all of you ostriches.

KENDRA: Haskell, I asked you to stop. (*sharply, to RAWLEY*) Why don't I give you the tour. (*to others*) Excuse us, will you?

(KENDRA and RAWLEY exit.)

NED: Jesus, in a million years.

VALERIE: Oh why shouldn't she date an older man? When I was fifteen I had lovers twice my age.

NED: I'm guessing he wants to get next to you.

VALERIE: You really think so? We'll have to clear that up, won't we? (*darkens*) He called her "darling," did anybody catch that?

DAWN: I caught it.

NED: We all caught it, Valerie. (*to JASON*) So did you take his picture?

JASON: I took his picture, uh-huh.

NED: What were the circumstances?

JASON: In the line of duty.

NED: What duty?

VALERIE: Ned, he obviously doesn't want to say. Jason? Dawn? Let's get this cover photography done. Ned, you come too. These shoots always go better when I have someone to bark at.

(VALERIE exits with DAWN. NED hangs back.)

NED: Buddy, just for the fun of it—why don't we Google Rawley Bateson.

HASKELL: Hello. I'm already on it.

(NED exits. HASKELL pokes at his laptop. Lights down in the family room.)

(Lights up on the veranda as KENDRA and RAWLEY enter.)

RAWLEY: —You're upset about that jigsaw puzzle. Please don't be.

KENDRA: What am I supposed to think? All that trouble you went to, for a woman you've never met.

RAWLEY: Oh, it wasn't any trouble. My assistant took care of everything. It was a clumsy attempt to get into your family's good graces. I'm afraid I failed miserably with Haskell.

KENDRA: Oh you can't ever succeed with Haskell. He's mental on the subject of UFOs. From the time he was a baby, practically.

(RAWLEY examines the telescope on the veranda.)

RAWLEY: Is this Haskell's scope?

KENDRA: Yes, that was mom's Christmas present to Haskell. She thought she could still afford it.

RAWLEY: This is a Nexstar 8i. Nice piece of equipment. Quiet motor. Good sky align.

KENDRA: You're into astronomy?

RAWLEY: Just the last few months or so.

KENDRA: So what's the deal with this asteroid? You don't seem the least bit concerned.

RAWLEY: Well...when it comes to rumors...you have to ask yourself, "Who profits?"

KENDRA: You mean Haskell. All the hits he's getting.

RAWLEY: Exactly.

KENDRA: But Haskell didn't start the rumors.

RAWLEY: Didn't he?

KENDRA: No! I mean he's fanatical, but I can't believe he'd ever be that....that devious...that unethical....

RAWLEY: You never know what people will do...especially ambitious people. Tell me about your dad. He manages your mother's money?

KENDRA: And her friends' money.

RAWLEY: How convenient for him.

KENDRA: No, it's pathetic, actually. I used to watch them at parties. He'd hang out with the stars' children. She woke up one day and realized she was married to a civilian.

RAWLEY: But he still handles her investments.

KENDRA: What's left of them. She's hanging by a thread. We all are. The whole family.

RAWLEY: So tell me, did you find an apartment for that paranoid?

KENDRA: Yes, but she wouldn't take it. She can't live on a street with palm trees. She's scared of the fronds.

RAWLEY: Frustrating for you. Such a waste of your talents. (*pause*) I had a chance to read your clinic proposal.

KENDRA: You did? What did you think?

RAWLEY: It's everything I hoped for. I think it sounds marvelous.

KENDRA: Really? Oh gosh.

RAWLEY: Mixed populations—makes perfect sense.

KENDRA: Doesn't it? Not that I'd stop seeing homeless people...just not all the time.... There'd be homeless people, and battered women, and addicts, and runaways, and AIDS victims, rich people, poor people, everything in between.

RAWLEY: Old and young together.

KENDRA: Exactly.

RAWLEY: We know that works, don't we.

KENDRA: (*uneasily*) Yes...yes we do...absolutely...ohmigod, I'm so thrilled you'd even consider...being involved.

RAWLEY: Oh, I'm way past considering it. Now what about this fellow Jason?

KENDRA: What about him?

RAWLEY: Your mother said you were friends.

KENDRA: We are. We're friends. He's actually a very talented photographer, that's why my mom invited him.... Rawley, what is it?

(*A wave of dizziness hits RAWLEY. He sits down.*)

RAWLEY: It's been a long day. I wonder, Kendra, could you get me a glass of water?

KENDRA: Are you OK? What's the matter?

RAWLEY: Nothing's the matter. I'm fine.

KENDRA: Are you sure?

RAWLEY: Yes, I'm sure. Run along, Kendra, and I'll meet you inside.

(KENDRA exits. When she's gone, RAWLEY takes a vial from his jacket pocket, shakes out a pill, swallows it dry, goes over to the telescope, peers through.

The land line rings. Lights up on the family room as DAWN enters, answers the phone.)

DAWN: Hello, this is Dawn...I'm sorry, Valerie can't come to the phone just now... Who?...Yes, of course! I'll try to find her, please hold. *(calls, excited)* Valerie? It's Annette!

(VALERIE enters.)

DAWN: *(into phone)* She's in the middle of a photo shoot, but hold on.

VALERIE: Tell them it's for *Esquire*. Women We Love.

DAWN: *(gives VALERIE a look; into phone)* It's for *Redbook*. Wait, I think they're breaking. Yes, here she is. *(covers phone)* Annette! Deep breaths!

(VALERIE steadies herself, as though about to make an entrance. Takes the phone from DAWN. NED and JASON enter.)

VALERIE: *(on phone)* Annette, how lovely to hear from you!... Well, it must be at least that long...Yes, the asteroid rumors, you've heard those too?... Warren's scared? He's always scared about something, isn't he. Where did he hear about the rumors?... UFOnut? You're kidding, that's my son! That's Haskell's blog! Everybody's reading him, he's getting tons of attention.

(VALERIE signals DAWN for pen and paper.)

VALERIE: Adastra, can you spell that for me?...A-D-A-S-T-R-A....Thank you, and what's Warren up to?...Really?...Does he have the financing?...Well, I'd love to see the script, what a lovely birthday surprise....Well, I'm actually a Virgo...I'll explain when I see you both...Bye, Annette.

(VALERIE hangs up, stunned. Lights down on the veranda as RAWLEY abandons the telescope and exits.)

VALERIE: It must be 20 years. I nursed Annette through that movie, poor thing. And she never gave me proper credit.

NED: Why is she calling you now?

VALERIE: Can you believe it? Suddenly Warren has a script he wants me to read. Oh, and she says there's a spaceflight we can take, if it comes to that.

NED: What do you mean, spaceflight?

VALERIE: Before an asteroid hits. The company's called Adastra.

NED: Haskell?

HASKELL: It exists. Adastra. It means "To the stars."

VALERIE: To the stars! How appropriate!

HASKELL: They send rich people into space.

VALERIE: Only this wouldn't be a tourist flight. Only certain people will be let on board.

NED: Which people?

VALERIE: Seems unfair, doesn't it...though I suppose if celebrities can't get the death penalty...we shouldn't have to die in an asteroid collision.

NED: Buddy, say something. Tell your mother this is nonsense.

HASKELL: You can't live forever on a spaceship. Unless you're in cryogenic suspension.

VALERIE: But couldn't they send us to a space station? Or somewhere on the Moon?

(RAWLEY *enters with* KENDRA.)

VALERIE: Rawley, what do you know about this company—Adastra.

RAWLEY: Adastra, yes. Don't they do space tourism?

VALERIE: (*to* NED) There, you see?

NED: See what? These people aren't living in space. A few orbits,

and home, James.

VALERIE: Rawley, can you please set this man straight?

RAWLEY: Can I propose a toast first?

VALERIE: Yes, of course. *(to DAWN)* Remind me to call Warren.

RAWLEY: Glasses up.

(Everybody but HASKELL reaches for a glass.)

RAWLEY: For better or worse...with all my faults...and the ones she has yet to discover....to Kendra, my future wife.

(RAWLEY clinks glasses with a stunned KENDRA.)

VALERIE: I must be dreaming. You did say “future wife”?

RAWLEY: That’s what I said.

VALERIE: I may faint.

(VALERIE seizes RAWLEY by the elbow.)

KENDRA: Mom, what are you doing?

VALERIE: Will you all excuse us?

KENDRA: Where are you going?

VALERIE: We’re going to take a little walk around the garden.

KENDRA: Why don’t you ask Rawley if he wants to?

VALERIE: It’s a mother’s privilege, dear.

RAWLEY: Kendra, it’s OK.

VALERIE: Come along, you dear man. We must have a serious talk.

(VALERIE sweeps RAWLEY out of the room.)

NED: Well. Did you see this coming, sweetheart?

KENDRA: *(with a desperate look at JASON)* Not exactly, no.

HASKELL: He lives in New York. What happens to your clients?

JASON: (*darkly*) Rawley's taking care of that.

NED: What's that supposed to mean?

KENDRA: It doesn't mean anything. Let's not get ahead of ourselves.

JASON: He's investing in her clinic. Isn't that right?

KENDRA: Yes, as a matter of fact, he is. He loves the whole idea.

HASKELL: Oh I see. So it's tit for tat.

NED: Buddy, that'll do. (*to KENDRA*) I wonder what he meant...all the faults you haven't discovered.

HASKELL: Are you living at his apartment?

KENDRA: No, I'm not living at his apartment. Why are you asking me all these questions?

NED: Kendra, you know I've always admired you. Your kindness...your decency....your devotion to the less fortunate...which is why I have to question...seriously question...why you've fallen for this...this Republican.

KENDRA: Who says I've fallen for him? Why do you assume he's a Republican?

NED: Isn't he?

KENDRA: Yes! Now could you all please leave me alone?

NED: Sure, sweetheart. We'll get out of your way. (*to HASKELL*) Keep Googling, buddy.

(*NED and HASKELL exit.*)

DAWN: (*aside to JASON*) Hang in there, lovebird.

(*On JASON's surprised look, DAWN exits.*)

KENDRA: Ohmigod, ohmigod, ohmigod.

JASON: Well...I can always do the wedding photography.

KENDRA: Stop it. This is serious. This is horrible.

JASON: What do you mean, horrible? You must have seen it coming.

KENDRA: No. We never discussed marriage. That was never an issue. I don't even like New York! And neither do you!

JASON: Leave me out of this equation, OK? Just do what you have to do. If it means saving a bunch of lives, maybe it's worth marrying a crook.

KENDRA: What do you mean, a crook?

JASON: OK. Rawley was on the board of this company, Vogelcom? They forced their wholesalers to accept more inventory than they could sell, so they could inflate their revenue statements.

KENDRA: Why didn't you tell me this before?

JASON: Because I didn't know before. I thought he was "Raleigh," like Sir Walter Raleigh? I didn't connect the name with the picture I took.

KENDRA: What picture? When?

JASON: Coming out of a courthouse. On a perp walk.

KENDRA: Rawley went to jail?!

JASON: The indictment was dismissed.

KENDRA: So he's not actually a crook.

JASON: Is it worth marrying him to find out?

KENDRA: He said he loved my proposal. Maybe he'd invest in me anyway.

JASON: On the other hand...he may be looking at other priorities.

KENDRA: Meaning what?

JASON: Your mom must be all over him by now. Going by my experience.

KENDRA: Yeah, don't remind me.

JASON: So what are you going to do?

KENDRA: OK. This is what I'm going to do. I'm going to tell him sorry, Rawley, I'm flattered by your proposal, I'm deeply touched, I would love nothing more than to be in business with you, but no, I just can't marry you.

JASON: And if he asks you why not?

KENDRA: Because I'm in love with somebody else.

JASON: You sure that's what you want to do?

KENDRA: Yes, I'm sure.

JASON: Be poor together again? Give up your dream?

(Pause.)

KENDRA: I'd better go rescue him.

(KENDRA exits the family room.

Lights up on the veranda as VALERIE and RAWLEY enter from the garden.)

VALERIE: —And did Kendra ever mention me?

RAWLEY: Well, of course I knew who her mother was.

VALERIE: And you never said anything?

RAWLEY: I sensed she didn't want me to.

VALERIE: I can't really blame her. It's no picnic being the child of a celebrity. The sight of us making a room go quiet can have a very distorting effect on a child.

RAWLEY: You must have done something right. Kendra has more strength of character than anyone I know.

VALERIE: Yes, I know, it's sad. When I think of those horrible people she has to deal with every day, the risks to life and limb and sanity, it makes me want to scream. Mother Teresa in denim—not what I dreamed of for my daughter.

RAWLEY: It's not what I dream of either. That's why I'm investing in her clinic.

VALERIE: Rawley, that's the best news I've had in years.

RAWLEY: Then I've made you happy too.

VALERIE: You have no idea. I'm curious, have you ever considered the movie business? As an investment opportunity.

RAWLEY: It's crossed my mind.

VALERIE: Really? Because Warren has this amazing script.

RAWLEY: Is there a part for you in it?

VALERIE: Oh yes, a wonderful part.

(A phone rings.)

VALERIE: Dawn, will you get that? *(to RAWLEY)* Would I be totally out of line if I gave Warren your number?

RAWLEY: I'd be happy to talk to Warren.

VALERIE: Fantastic. And I'm glad you weren't dazzled by the family connection.

RAWLEY: Of course I was dazzled. I'm a huge fan.

VALERIE: Really. How many of my movies have you seen?

RAWLEY: I may have missed an early one or two.

VALERIE: *Scare Tactics?* Did you like me in that?

RAWLEY: That one I didn't see.

(KENDRA appears in the doorway, hangs back during:)

VALERIE: Now I think I could trust you with my life.

RAWLEY: Why now?

VALERIE: Because I wasn't in that movie. Did you really look forward to meeting me? You weren't secretly dreading it? People do, you know. Always a chance they'll be disillusioned.

RAWLEY: On the contrary. I'm going to rent every one of your movies again.

VALERIE: Oh, you're such a love! I can't believe my daughter's luck!

(VALERIE *squeezes* RAWLEY's hand. KENDRA *enters*.)

KENDRA: Valerie!

VALERIE: What is it, dear? We've been having the loveliest chat.

KENDRA: You're doing it again.

VALERIE: Doing what?

RAWLEY: Excuse me, I'll leave you two alone.

KENDRA: No, she's going. (*to* VALERIE) Julia's on the phone.

VALERIE: Julia?! Oh God, they're coming out of the woodwork!
(*to* RAWLEY) Will you excuse me, darling? I really
have to take this. Back in a sec. (*to* KENDRA) I have no idea
what you're talking about.

(VALERIE *exits*.)

RAWLEY: Sweetheart, don't be upset. Your mother was just—

KENDRA: I know what she was just. What were you two discussing?

RAWLEY: You. Your character. Your career.

KENDRA: The movie business?

RAWLEY: It came up. You haven't given me your answer.

KENDRA: You didn't give me a chance. In front of my
whole family....you took my breath away.

RAWLEY: Kendra, this clinic of yours can be more than a dream. I
don't think you've entirely grasped that yet.

KENDRA: No, believe me, I grasp it.

RAWLEY: In that case, darling, do you mind getting me another glass
of water?

KENDRA: What's the matter?

RAWLEY: I'm fine, dear. Just feeling a little parched.

KENDRA: Are you sure?

RAWLEY: Yes, I'm sure.

(KENDRA exits. When she's gone, RAWLEY quickly pops another pill, then grabs the veranda railing, warding off another dizzy spell.

HASKELL appears in the doorway.)

HASKELL: Steady, old man.

(RAWLEY quickly puts away the pill vial.)

HASKELL: What are the pills for?

RAWLEY: Nothing you need to worry about.

HASKELL: Uh-huh. You're really gonna marry my sister?

RAWLEY: If she'll have me.

HASKELL: You want to try everything. Before it's too late.

RAWLEY: Excuse me?

HASKELL: You've never been married before.

RAWLEY: You've been checking up on me, Haskell.

HASKELL: You came close a couple of times.

RAWLEY: Narrow escapes.

HASKELL: Anybody famous? I couldn't tell.

RAWLEY: Not in the Hollywood sense.

HASKELL: Models. That's what you New York guys go for. I could never have sex with a model.

RAWLEY: Why not, Haskell?

HASKELL: Too tall. I couldn't date-rape a girl either.

RAWLEY: Nobody's asking you to.

HASKELL: In fact, I've never seen a girl and said to myself, "I want to have sex with her." How about you?

RAWLEY: How about me what?

HASKELL: Do you ever picture yourself in the act of love? Do you “undress girls with your eyes”?

RAWLEY: Depends on the girl.

HASKELL: If you could never have sex again, would that bother you?

RAWLEY: You know what occurs to me, Haskell? All this interest in ETs...might be a distraction from earthly confusions. Didn't your father tell you about the birds and bees?

HASKELL: Yeah, if you really want to know. The first time he drove me to college. He asked did I have any questions about sex. I wasn't gonna say anything, but he looked so pathetic. He asked me if I was a virgin. I told him yeah. He was like, are you shy around girls? Are you worried about getting an erection? OK, yeah. Have you ever been with a girl? No. Do you jerk off? Yeah. Do you get an erection when you jerk off? Yes. Then you have nothing to worry about.

RAWLEY: Sounds like good advice to me. Are you still a virgin, Haskell?

HASKELL: Maybe I am, maybe I'm not. Will you be able to give my sister everything she wants?

RAWLEY: I hope so. Tell me, Haskell, are you up to 20,000 hits yet? I know an ad-placing company might want to talk to you.

HASKELL: Why are you trying to change the subject? You think I won't get to 20,000 hits?

RAWLEY: I think you're counting on it.

HASKELL: Yeah well, Kendra's counting on you. Have you told her?

RAWLEY: Told Kendra what?

HASKELL: You know what.

RAWLEY: No, I don't know what. If you don't mind, Haskell, I'd like to be by myself right now.

HASKELL: Sure. OK. I'll leave you alone. (HASKELL *starts out, doubles back.*) ETs can't make humans pregnant. That's another big myth. So no reason to feel jealous.

(HASKELL *exits*. RAWLEY *settles himself in a wicker chair, riding out a new wave of pain. Lights down on the veranda.*

Lights up on the family room as VALERIE enters.)

VALERIE: (*on phone*) —Adastra, darling....They send civilians into space, Warren says they're gearing up to do it *en masse*...Yes, because of the rumors, why else?....I don't have time to be terrified, because Julia, listen, more amazing news, the most wonderful man has come into our lives and he's asked my daughter to marry him....Of course I'm thrilled for her, why wouldn't I be....Julia I have to run, I'll keep you posted on every single thing. (*hangs up; to DAWN*) Call Kate, tell her anything she wants to pay you, I'll double it.

DAWN: Ohmigod, how exciting! I'm the target of a bidding war!

(DAWN *exits*. NED and HASKELL *have entered*.)

NED: What makes you think you can afford Dawn now?

VALERIE: Ned, I don't know if you've noticed, but there's been a sea change in our fortunes.

NED: Not just Kendra's fortunes.

VALERIE: No, that would be horribly selfish of Kendra.

NED: And who knows...Rawley might even want to finance a movie.

VALERIE: Yes, and I'm putting him together with Warren. So there.

NED: Sit down, Valerie.

VALERIE: I can't. I'm much too excited.

NED: I said sit down and listen! During your *tête-à-tête* with Rawley...did he happen to mention Vogelgate?

VALERIE: We didn't talk politics.

NED: This isn't politics, Valerie. This is business.

(KENDRA *appears in the doorway with RAWLEY's glass of water*.)

NED: Hello, Kendra. Come in and sit down. We're talking about Vogelgate.

KENDRA: I know all about Vogelgate. The indictment was dismissed.

NED: Hold on, there's more. Haskell?

HASKELL: In 2005, Rawley Bateson bought a consignment of African art for \$30,000, donated it to an inner-city museum and took a charitable deduction of \$400,000.

KENDRA: And how was that case resolved?

HASKELL: The IRS backed off.

VALERIE: And there you are! Kendra, I love this new attitude of yours. We all of us live in moral twilight.

NED: Keep going, buddy.

HASKELL: Did he ever tell you he was sick?

KENDRA: What do you mean, sick?

NED: Haskell?

HASKELL: Between June 3 and July 6 of this year, Rawley Bateson made visits to the Angeles Clinic, Valley Radiology, and Tower Urology, all in the city of Los Angeles. On Thursday the 15th of August he was admitted to Cedars-Sinai Hospital, where he was operated on by Chet Flanagan, the foremost prostate surgeon in L.A., and discharged on the morning of the 17th.

VALERIE: (to KENDRA) Oh, how distressing. Nothing's private anymore, is it?

NED: You didn't know anything about his illness?

KENDRA: No, I didn't.

NED: Not even a whisper?

JASON: She said no!

NED: I'm talking to my daughter. Does he have a scar on his belly?

KENDRA: How would I know?

NED: Ah. Just as I thought.

VALERIE: Ned, I don't approve of this line of questioning. Every man gets this disease eventually.

NED: And half of them never get it up again.

HASKELL: There's a photographic subject for you, Jason. Limp Dicks of the Rich and Famous.

VALERIE: Haskell, that's a perfectly hideous thing to say. Go to your room.

HASKELL: Don't worry, I'm going.

(HASKELL *exits.*)

VALERIE: (*to KENDRA*) So you're going into this blind?

KENDRA: Blind about what?

VALERIE: You haven't tested the sexual waters?

JASON: She already answered that!

NED: (*to JASON*) She wasn't talking to you. Why are you getting so worked up?

KENDRA: Jason's right, it's none of your business! You people are disgusting!

VALERIE: I'll take that as a no. Well listen, sex is not the be-all and the end-all. This is a brilliant, wealthy, attractive man, and if you don't snap him up, I guarantee someone else will.

NED: Somebody older.

VALERIE: Keep your snide remarks to yourself. (*to KENDRA*) You'll still be able to have his children. He must have donated his sperm somewhere.

NED: Older men's sperm is defective. Speaking for myself, I'd rather not have a schizophrenic grandchild.

VALERIE: Oh, don't be so morbid. He was a millionaire before he was 30, I'm sure he's been donating his sperm all along. What kind of pre-nup is he asking for?

NED: That was my next question.

KENDRA: Enough. All of you. Just stop!

VALERIE: Sweetheart, I'm on your side!

KENDRA: Do us both a favor? Stay the hell off my side.

(KENDRA *storms out of the family room.*)

VALERIE: Oh well. She can always take a lover. Jason, where are you going? I don't mean right this second.

(JASON *exits.*)

VALERIE: He must be in agony, poor lamb.

NED: Why don't you try and "console" him?

VALERIE: Console him? What are you talking about?

(DAWN *bursts in.*)

DAWN: Ohmigod, it's happening.

VALERIE: What's happening?

DAWN: This scientist was saying, if all the countries pooled their nukes? And exploded them in one place? We could move the Earth out of orbit and dodge the asteroid that way.

NED: That's preposterous.

VALERIE: What does it matter? I'll be in outer space by then.

DAWN: Stop joking about this, this is serious!

VALERIE: I wasn't really joking, dear. (*to NED*) What exactly did you mean by "console him"?

NED: Come on. Didn't you ever wonder why she stopped bringing Jason around? Or any of her other boyfriends? Why all these months she never once mentioned Rawley Bateson?

VALERIE: What are you talking about? It was you who wasn't around. I saw a huge amount of Jason.

NED: And pounced on the boy like the cougar you are. As if Kendra didn't exist.

VALERIE: That's absurd. I never slept with Jason! You, you're the one who can't stop competing. And who precisely are you jealous of? Do you ever know? Or is it just free-floating envy of anyone richer, smarter, or more successful than yourself? As far as Kendra goes, her happiness has always come first with me. If my happiness is the byproduct, then so much the better.

NED: I'm going to pretend you actually believe that. Because Haskell will never let this rest.

(An ALIEN LIFE FORM has emerged from the garden onto the veranda. The ALIEN has large black almond-shaped eyes, lemur-like fingers, and a slim, featureless body.)

RAWLEY appears to be dozing in the wicker chair. His back is to the ALIEN. The ALIEN circles in front of RAWLEY. RAWLEY appears to stiffen, as though in fright. The glass in RAWLEY'S hand falls to the floor and shatters on the tile.

KENDRA comes onto the veranda with JASON. Gasps at the sight of the ALIEN. Sees RAWLEY slumped in the chair.)

KENDRA: Ohmigod!

(The ALIEN removes its head. Underneath is HASKELL.)

KENDRA: What did you do to him, you clueless idiot! Rawley? Oh God. Rawley!

(HASKELL picks up a silver coaster, shoves it under RAWLEY's nose.)

KENDRA: What are you doing. Get away.

HASKELL: See if he's breathing.

KENDRA: Go! Now! Get out of here!

(HASKELL backs off. KENDRA takes RAWLEY's pulse. RAWLEY's eyes open at her touch.)

RAWLEY: *(weakly)* Kendra?

KENDRA: Oh, thank God. What's the matter? Are you all right?

(RAWLEY winces with pain. VALERIE, NED, and DAWN appear in the doorway.)

DAWN: Ohmigod!

(RAWLEY'S *eyes close again.*)

VALERIE: (*rushing to his side*) Rawley? What happened?

KENDRA: Don't go to sleep. Talk to me.

VALERIE: Rawley?

KENDRA: Rawley?!

(*Blackout.* END OF ACT I.)

ACT II

(The next day. The stage is split as in Act I between two non-adjacent spaces. Left, a hospital bed, two chairs and a TV suggest a hospital room. A door opens onto an unseen hallway; a second door leads to an unseen bathroom. Right, the chairs and sofa from Act I have been rearranged to suggest a hospital waiting room. The tall window now looks out toward what might be the Pacific Ocean.)

Dim light on the hospital room. RAWLEY is dead asleep in the hospital bed.

Lights up on the waiting area as JASON enters. KENDRA is sitting there alone.)

JASON: How's Rawley doing?

KENDRA: I don't know yet. He's sleeping.

JASON: You haven't talked?

KENDRA: No. They won't let me see him.

JASON: Is it his heart? Did Haskell give him a coronary?

KENDRA: Jason, I don't know. If it turns out he did, I'll kill him.
What took you so long to get here?

JASON: I got stuck on Wilshire. Huge traffic jam.

KENDRA: Why, what's happening on Wilshire?

JASON: Big demonstration outside the Federal Building.

KENDRA: Who's demonstrating?

JASON: Mostly crazies. "The End is Near," a lot of signs like that.
Thought I recognized a couple of your clients. So did you ever give Rawley an answer?

KENDRA: No. He sent me away, by the time I got back he was lying there on the veranda.

JASON: So how did you leave it with him?

KENDRA: Jason, what if he's dying? What if he only has months to live? Days? Hours?

JASON: You mean like a bedside wedding. Performed by the hospital chaplain. With a letter of intent about your clinic. Is that what you're thinking?

KENDRA: No! Who do you think I am?

JASON: It never crossed your mind.

KENDRA: What difference does it make, if we're all gonna be wiped out?

VALERIE: *(entering)* What difference does what make?

(VALERIE and HASKELL have entered the waiting room. VALERIE is dressed in celebrity incognito: baseball cap and sunglasses. HASKELL is wearing his T-shirt and pajama bottoms and is carrying his laptop.)

KENDRA: We're talking about Rawley.

VALERIE: Of course Rawley makes a difference. He makes all the difference in the world. Jason, hello dear. How's everyone holding up? Have you been to see him?

HASKELL: Yeah, how's the old boy doing?

KENDRA: Get him away from me.

JASON: We don't know how he is. He's asleep.

VALERIE: Oh dear. He's not in a coma, is he?

HASKELL: I never meant to hurt him. He got on my nerves. Hiding things from Kendra. Saying he didn't believe in UFOs.

KENDRA: So you tried to frighten him to death.

VALERIE: *(to KENDRA)* He was just making a point, dear. An idiotic point, but nevertheless.

KENDRA: *(re laptop)* And would you stop poking at your computer? It's driving me nuts.

VALERIE: She's right, Haskell. It's very distracting.

KENDRA: So are you. Why are you wearing sunglasses?

(NED enters. entering, hears this.)

NED: She's afraid of not being recognized. How's the patient?

VALERIE: We don't know his condition yet. Sit down, Ned, and be quiet.

NED: (*sits; to VALERIE*) Does this take you back?

VALERIE: No, good Lord, why should it.

NED: Why? Because I spent twelve agonizing hours in this very room. Waiting for Haskell to be born. Don't you remember, the obstetrician, what was his name, there was something obscene about his name—

HASKELL: Chasm.

NED: Chasm, that's right, Dr. Chasm, he wouldn't let me see you, but he insisted on showing me the placenta. Looked like it came out of a pizza box. He said it was the best-formed placenta he'd ever seen.

KENDRA: Too bad they threw away the baby instead.

VALERIE: Hush, darling. It's not Haskell's fault. He can't help being jealous.

KENDRA: Jealous? He's not jealous. That's a human emotion.

VALERIE: Please, he's totally fixated! (*sotto*) The first time you brought Jason home? Haskell refused to come out of his room. One time, this was so bizarre, I found your photograph under his pillow—one of Jason's pictures and not exactly PG-rated. It was all wrinkled and torn, with your measurements scribbled across it.

KENDRA: My measurements!

VALERIE: I know—how retro is that. Just pretend he's one of your clients.

(*Lights down on waiting area. Lights up on hospital room as BLANCA, the nurse, enters.*)

BLANCA: Mr. Bateson? (*no response*) Mr. Bateson? (RAWLEY's eyes open.) I'm here to check your vitals.

RAWLEY: Hello, Blanca.

(*BLANCA takes RAWLEY's blood pressure:*)

BLANCA: Are you comfortable, Mr. Bateson? Is the pain any better?

RAWLEY: Still hurts.

BLANCA: I'll see about your dosage.

RAWLEY: What's my pressure?

BLANCA: One fifty over a hundred.

RAWLEY: How were my enzymes? Any sign of a coronary?

BLANCA: That's not for me to say.

RAWLEY: Flanagan's still puzzled, isn't he.

BLANCA: Please try and relax, Mr. Bateson.

RAWLEY: I can't relax. I need to see my fiancée.

BLANCA: Young woman? Very attractive? That's your fiancée?
She's been asking for you.

RAWLEY: Is her mother there?

BLANCA: I didn't see a mother.

RAWLEY: Well, tell the daughter to come up. Her name's Kendra.

BLANCA: I'll ask Doctor.

RAWLEY: Tell Flanagan I insist.

BLANCA: All right. But you must try and get some rest.

(RAWLEY turns on the TV, starts going back and forth between the cable news channels.)

TV ANCHOR: —Lindora is standing by in Severance, Kansas, where residents have already begun to hoard food and water—

(Another channel:)

TV REPORTER: —NASA continues to deny that any action has been taken. Still no word from the White House—

BLANCA: I don't call that resting. When I watch these reports I want to jump off a roof.

RAWLEY: So you think these rumors are real?

BLANCA: Don't you? Why are you smiling?

RAWLEY: Just tell Flanagan I need to see my fiancée.

(BLANCA exits. RAWLEY continues to switch channels.)

TV REPORTER: —Whatever the truth of the rumors, the company, Adastra, may have anticipated this crisis by several years, gearing up to send leaders in science, entertainment, and politics into safe orbit—

(Rawley mutes the TV, closes his eyes contentedly. Lights down on the hospital room.

Lights up on the waiting area.)

NED: Whoa, everybody—announcement. Haskell just broke 25,000 hits.

VALERIE: Congratulations, dear.

NED: What does that work out to in ad terms?

HASKELL: Three hundred dollars a week.

KENDRA: It's blood money.

HASKELL: What do you mean, "blood money"?

KENDRA: Scaring people left and right. You're like an arsonist. They oughta lock you in a room without a laptop and watch you panic.

(BLANCA enters the waiting area.)

BLANCA: Mr. Bateson would like to see Kendra.

KENDRA: I'm Kendra. Is he awake?

BLANCA: Yes, and he's asking for you.

VALERIE: Oh thank goodness. *(starts out)*

KENDRA: He didn't ask for you, mother. He asked for me.

BLANCA: Actually, he asked for both of you.

VALERIE: *(to KENDRA)* You see? *(to BLANCA)* Tell him we'll be right there.

KENDRA: Sit down and stay put!

VALERIE: Kendra, you mustn't order me around.

KENDRA: I said sit down! The last thing he needs is you sniffing up his leg. *(to BLANCA)* Where do I go?

BLANCA: Take the elevator to the 8th floor.

(KENDRA exits)

BLANCA: *(to VALERIE)* I know you, don't I? From the movies.

VALERIE: That's right, dear.

BLANCA: Tell me, are you an astronaut?

VALERIE: No, I've never played an astronaut.

BLANCA: An engineer? A geologist? A doctor? A nurse?

VALERIE: I did play a nurse on a soap, that's absolutely right.

BLANCA: So you're none of those things. So why in the name of heaven would they send you into space? What possible use can you be?

VALERIE: Well, the same use we are on Earth. To entertain... to inspire...to magnify the human spirit....

BLANCA: To cheapen another planet like you cheapened this one.

VALERIE: You see there, Ned? My fan base is bigger than you thought. *(to BLANCA as she exits)* Say hi to Rawley for me!

(BLANCA exits. DAWN enters.)

DAWN: How's Mr. Bateson doing? What's wrong with him, do they know?

VALERIE: We're all waiting to hear.

DAWN: Maybe they should move him?

VALERIE: What do you mean, move him?

DAWN: To another hospital. I hear people are heading inland in case of a tsunami. That's crazy though, isn't it? What if the asteroid doesn't fall in the ocean? I guess they're just playing the odds. The one that wiped out the dinosaurs fell in the ocean, didn't you tell me that, Haskell?

NED: *(to DAWN)* Aren't you supposed to be at Kate's?

DAWN: I couldn't leave Valerie at a time of crisis.

NED: It's not Valerie's crisis.

DAWN: What do you mean, it's all our crisis. The Chinese are saying it's headed straight for them.

VALERIE: Dawn, are you freaking out, dear?

DAWN: Oh how can you tell.

VALERIE: Well, try and get a grip, all right, sweetheart? I've got things on my mind besides planetary death.

(Lights down on the waiting area as VALERIE exits.)

(Lights up on the hospital room as KENDRA enters with BLANCA.)

BLANCA: I'm afraid he's gone back to sleep.

RAWLEY: *(drowsily)* No....I'm here....who's there?

KENDRA: It's me. It's Kendra.

RAWLEY: Kendra! Hello, darling!

BLANCA: *(to KENDRA)* You'll be sure he stays in bed, will you?

KENDRA: Yes, I'll make sure. Thank you.

BLANCA: By the way, Mr. Bateson told me all about your clinic. I think it's a wonderful idea. My sister is a psychiatric nurse, very competent, will you be taking applications?

RAWLEY: Blanca, we'll let you know. Could you leave us alone now?

BLANCA: Of course. Just checking.

(BLANCA exits. RAWLEY reaches out feebly to KENDRA.)

KENDRA: Shh, don't, she said not to get up. Are you in a lot of pain?

RAWLEY: You promise not to be jealous? I'm having a little fling with Lady Vicodin.

KENDRA: Have they told you what's wrong?

RAWLEY: At first they thought a bowel obstruction, but now they're mystified. My white count is up and they're waiting for the radiologist. So what's the answer, Kendra?

KENDRA: To what?

RAWLEY: Don't be coy. You know what I'm asking.

KENDRA: I won't desert you, Rawley.

RAWLEY: I didn't expect you would. Tell me, Kendra, what if we never made love again? Would that be a dealbreaker?

KENDRA: Is that what they're afraid of?

RAWLEY: We're way past fear. We're into terror. Fear is the first time you can't get it up the second time. Terror is the second time you can't get it up the first time. Flanagan urged me to look at porn, but I can't seem to find it on the hospital TV—

(VALERIE *bursts in.*)

KENDRA: Mom, what are you doing, you're not allowed here!

VALERIE: Goodness, he looks so pale. What's the problem? Do they know?

RAWLEY: They're running some tests. Hello, Valerie.

VALERIE: Hello, dear. I didn't sleep a wink last night. Three Ambiens, I was still wide awake.

RAWLEY: I'm touched you came to see me.

VALERIE: Well come on, how could I stay away.

KENDRA: Yes, how could you. Now go.

VALERIE: Well yes, if Rawley thinks I'm in the way—

RAWLEY: (*overlaps*) Of course you're not. KENDRA (*overlaps*): Go!

VALERIE: Should we flip a coin?

KENDRA: I said get out. And stay out.

VALERIE: (*to RAWLEY*) You have to forgive my daughter, she's terribly upset. (*to KENDRA*) Could you try and be civil to me? You're acting like a twelve-year-old. (*to RAWLEY*) We'll talk later.

(*VALERIE exits, blowing a kiss at RAWLEY as she goes.*)

RAWLEY: Easy does it. She means well.

KENDRA: I hate her.

RAWLEY: Is your dad here with her?

KENDRA: Everybody's here.

RAWLEY: I assume we don't have his blessing.

KENDRA: No, we don't have his blessing.

RAWLEY: Well, don't worry. I can be very persuasive when the chips are down. What about your friend? The photographer.

KENDRA: Jason? Yes, he's here.

RAWLEY: I thought he might be. Exactly how long have you known him, darling?

KENDRA: Rawley, I don't think you fully understand.

RAWLEY: I'm listening, dear.

KENDRA: For three months I didn't hear a word from you. You never bothered to call, no emails, nothing. Why didn't you tell me you were in L.A.?

RAWLEY: That was cowardly, I know. I was too selfish to give you up, and I didn't want to scare you off. Do me a favor? My jacket's hanging there, would you mind looking in the pocket?

(*KENDRA digs in the pocket. Takes out a ring box.*)

KENDRA: Ohmigosh.

RAWLEY: Well, aren't you going to open it?

(*KENDRA opens the ring box.*)

KENDRA: Oh. It's amazing.

RAWLEY: You do like it? It's not too showy? We can always economize on the wedding. So far the guest list is looking fairly thin.

(RAWLEY takes the ring out of the box.)

RAWLEY: And here's what you say to Jason. I have many friends in Los Angeles. If I tell them to sit for a certain artist, that can make that artist's career. Will you pass that along to him?

KENDRA: Yes, I'll pass that along.

RAWLEY: And just so we're clear. I'm not asking for a pre-nup and I've already changed my will.

KENDRA: When did you do that?

RAWLEY: My first time in the hospital. Everything goes to my wife.

KENDRA: I see.

RAWLEY: Is there anything left to discuss?

KENDRA: *(dazed)* No, I think that covers it.

RAWLEY: Then why don't you try it on....just for size.

(KENDRA lets RAWLEY slip the ring on. RAWLEY winces with pain.)

KENDRA: I've tired you out. I should leave you in peace.

RAWLEY: Don't go yet. See me to sleep. It does me good to have you near me.

(Lights fade in the hospital room.)

(Lights up on the waiting area. VALERIE is pacing.)

DAWN: Do you think she'll marry him now?

VALERIE: Why ask me? I don't pretend to know my daughter's mind.

DAWN: I don't think I could marry a dying man. No matter how rich he was.

VALERIE: Wait till one asks you, dear.

DAWN: Think of his family, how they'd resent you. .

VALERIE: (*sharply*) We're Rawley's family. Resentment is not in my repertoire.

(VALERIE's *cell rings*.)

VALERIE: Unknown caller. Find out who it is.

DAWN: (*into phone*) Hello, this is Dawn... I believe she's available, yes.

VALERIE: Who is it?

DAWN: Tom.

VALERIE: Which Tom?

DAWN: The good Tom!

(VALERIE *removes her sunglasses, takes the phone*.)

VALERIE: Well, hello, stranger!...Yes, isn't it staggering? I heard the evangelicals are going nuts, how's Rita taking it?...What do you mean, Warren signed us up with Adastra? Already?...Tell me, dear, do you mind if we sit together for liftoff?...You know so much about space travel, it would be so reassuring....

(VALERIE *moves off*. DAWN *has wandered over to HASKELL*.)

DAWN: Haskell, can I ask you a question?

HASKELL: I wish you wouldn't.

DAWN: Will there be room for assistants on the spaceflight?

HASKELL: Take that up with Valerie. I'm working.

VALERIE: (*into phone*) ...We still don't know about Rawley's condition, apparently it's as much a mystery as this asteroid...I'll tell him Warren wants to speak to him, of course I will... Bye, darling.
(*hangs up; to the air*) What on earth is keeping my daughter?

(*Lights down on the waiting area. Lights up in the hospital room.*
KENDRA *leaves the sleeping RAWLEY and tiptoes out*.)

(*As soon as KENDRA exits, RAWLEY reaches for the remote, turns the TV on.*)

TV ANCHOR: —In Los Angeles, a demonstration at the Federal Building on Wilshire Boulevard has drawn a crowd of 2000 marchers. Roswell, New Mexico, was the site of a candlelight vigil last night—

(Lights down on the hospital room. Lights up on the waiting area. DAWN is with JASON at the window.)

DAWN: Whoa, look at that sky. I've never seen it so red this time of day.

JASON: *(dejectedly)* It's only the sun going down.

DAWN: Are you sure? It looks like the end of the world to me. Of course your world has already ended, hasn't it? Kendra gets the lollipop and you get the stick. Wasn't exactly what you two had in mind, was it? Oh, don't give me that innocent look, it's my job to know everything. Try looking on the bright side.

JASON: Yeah, what would that be?

DAWN: If the plumber can't fix Rawley's problem...less fun for Kendra, but less agony for you. That is, assuming we're not all smashed to smithereens. Then nobody has to envy anybody.

JASON: Thank you, Dawn. That's so reassuring.

(KENDRA enters the waiting area.)

VALERIE: Oh thank God you're back. What's the matter, sweetheart? You look like you've had a shock, something's happened, what's wrong... *(sees ring)* Ohmigod!

NED: What is it? Valerie, calm down.

VALERIE: Look at this incredible stone! Look at me, I'm trembling! Oh God, my hands look so old! *(flustered)* I have to call Warren. *(to KENDRA)* Warren knows all about us. About you. And Rawley. He knows about Rawley.

JASON: Is that an engagement ring?

VALERIE: Well, of course it's an engagement ring. What else would it be?

NED: Did he happen to mention a pre-nup?

VALERIE: Oh for God's sake back off, Ned.

KENDRA: He's not asking for a pre-nup.

NED: That's what he says now. Wait till he tells his lawyers.

VALERIE: He's too important to listen to his lawyers. *(to KENDRA)* Oh I'm getting too excited. Dawn, will you find me a latté so I can take my Ativan?

DAWN: Did you bring an Ativan for me?

VALERIE: Don't I always? Go get the coffee, dear.

(DAWN exits.)

VALERIE: I really think I need to speak to Rawley.

KENDRA: About what?

VALERIE: The wedding arrangements. Where and when and how many people.

KENDRA: Don't you dare disturb him. He's still in pain. He's very weak.

NED *(to KENDRA)* Did the sexual issue come up?

JASON: Ned, shut up.

NED: Now listen here—I've had about enough from you. You have no rights in this matter, OK?

JASON: And you do? You're only a dad when it suits you.

NED: Hey, you want to take this outside? I'm game.

(JASON and NED are pushing and shoving. VALERIE takes out her cell.)

KENDRA: Stop it! Before they throw us all out!

(KENDRA separates them.)

KENDRA: *(aside to JASON)* Calm down. I can explain.

JASON: Don't bother explaining. I know when I'm licked.

VALERIE: *(on cell)* Hello? Warren? It's Valerie, darling...

HASKELL: *(at computer)* Dad?

VALERIE: (*into phone*) So Warren, seriously, how real is this asteroid threat, because I know how you love to worry... Well, what are the chances we can finish the movie before it hits?

HASKELL: Dad?

VALERIE: Ned, your son is calling you.

NED: I'm sorry, buddy. What?

VALERIE: (*into phone*) I can't hear you, everybody's yapping... No, I haven't talked business with Rawley, but the minute he's out of danger, which I know we're all praying for....

(VALERIE *moves off*. NED *peers over* HASKELL's *shoulder at the laptop*.)

NED: Outstanding, buddy. Great work.

HASKELL: Should I post it?

NED: Let's see how much juice there is in this grapefruit. Come on, kid, we'll do this together.

(NED *exits with* HASKELL.)

KENDRA: (*to* JASON) What did he mean by "grapefruit"?

JASON: I don't know and I don't give a shit.

KENDRA: Jason, you didn't see him. He looks so awful, I thought it might actually kill him if I didn't let him put the ring on my finger.

JASON: Why not just invest in your clinic? Why put you through the agony of burying a husband?

KENDRA: Because he's an optimist. Because he doesn't want to die a bachelor. Anyway, that's not an issue now.

JASON: What do you mean, it's not an issue? It's the issue.

KENDRA: I'm in the will.

JASON: How nice for you. Congratulations.

KENDRA: What if the shoe was on the other foot? What if my mom was sick and dying and made one of her passes and promised to leave her fortune to you, assuming she still had something resembling a fortune, could you tell her no to her face?

JASON: It hasn't come up. Yes, I could say no.

KENDRA: Fine, then you're obviously the better person. You deserve to have a show.

JASON: What are you talking about? What show?

KENDRA: He's going to talk you up to his friends. He says it'll make your career.

JASON: He promised you that?

KENDRA: My clinic and your career. (JASON *starts out*.) Where are you going? Jason? What do I tell him?

JASON: Tell him to go fuck himself.

(JASON *exits*. DAWN *enters with VALERIE's latté, thumbing her iPhone*.)

DAWN: Ohmigod! Adastra's website just crashed and they're rioting outside the home office! All the people who can't get on the flight. What if they find out the launch site and blow up all the celebrities?

KENDRA: Sounds like a plan.

DAWN: Bite your tongue! She's your mom! Ohmigod, I have to warn Valerie.

(DAWN *exits*. KENDRA *sinks into a chair*. *Lights down on the waiting area*.)

Lights up on RAWLEY's hospital room as NED and HASKELL enter. The TV is on. RAWLEY's eyes are open, staring at the ceiling. He looks dead.)

TV ANCHOR: —Houston Police have barricaded the streets around the Adastra building. Meanwhile, the White House continues to be silent on the actual extent of the threat—

NED: Turn that off.

HASKELL: (*mutes TV*) Is he dead?

(HASKELL *waves a hand in front of RAWLEY's face*. RAWLEY *opens his eyes, startling HASKELL and himself*.)

NED: Rawley! You're awake. How do you feel?

RAWLEY: How do you think I feel? What the hell are you doing here?

NED: Haskell, you first.

HASKELL: OK. First I want to say, I'm sorry.

RAWLEY: Sorry for what, Haskell?

NED: He never meant to give you a heart attack. He was just clowning around, isn't that right, buddy?

RAWLEY: I proposed to your sister. That made you angry.

HASKELL: That was part of it, yeah.

RAWLEY: You're in love with your sister. Nothing bizarre about that. If you were an ancient Egyptian, you'd be required to marry her. What else? State your business, gentlemen.

NED: We want to talk to you about this asteroid threat.

RAWLEY: What about it?

NED: It strikes us, Rawley, you've never been especially worried.

RAWLEY: Maybe you've noticed? I've had other things on my mind.

NED: So what do you really think? Where's it likely to hit? Are we all going to die? Or just some of us?

RAWLEY: Haskell? You're the UFO-ologist.

NED: I asked you, Rawley. Where does Adastra figure in?

HASKELL: We know you own stock in Adastra.

RAWLEY: I own stock in a lot of companies.

NED: You're on the board of this one.

RAWLEY: That's right. That's public knowledge.

NED: Not to Kendra, it isn't.

RAWLEY: What are you driving at exactly?

NED: I'll tell you what exactly. As of June this year, Adastra was on the verge of going belly up. Yes or no.

(RAWLEY *winces with pain.*)

NED: (*to HASKELL*) We hit a nerve already. (*to RAWLEY*)
Adastra sent two private citizens into orbit, without causing the
slightest ripple. Isn't that correct?

RAWLEY: They got the coverage they expected.

NED: But not enough to grow on. So you cooked up these asteroid
rumors. Seeded them on the Internet, booked millions of dollars in
spaceflight deposits, which took care of their cash-flow problem.

HASKELL: Don't bother answering, we know it's true.

NED: When were you planning on telling my daughter?

RAWLEY: Why, were you thinking of saying something?

NED: Give me one good reason I shouldn't.

RAWLEY: Haskell, why don't you let us have the room.

HASKELL: Why?

RAWLEY: Ned, please ask your son to leave.

(*NED hesitates.*)

NED: Buddy, wait for me downstairs.

HASKELL: Really?

NED: Yeah, this won't take long.

(*HASKELL exits.*)

RAWLEY: Close the door, will you?

(*NED closes the door.*)

RAWLEY: So...about this blackmail you're proposing.

NED: That's an ugly word. I want to help you out of this fix. .

RAWLEY: And just how do you plan to do that?

NED: Well, after all, I am a business manager.

RAWLEY: Ah. And you'd like to handle my money.

NED: A man of your stature? I wouldn't presume. But I know you have plenty of friends.

RAWLEY: Let's see if I understand. In return for providing you with contacts, you promise not to say anything to Kendra about my involvement with Adastra. Is that about it?

NED: That's putting it baldly, but yes.

RAWLEY: Tell me, Ned, do you love your family?

NED: Of course I love my family.

RAWLEY: And we wouldn't want them to love you any less. Though how you managed to fool the IRS for so long only speaks to how understaffed they are.

NED: You've lost me there, Rawley.

RAWLEY: Long before you vetted me, I vetted you. Particularly the family finances.

NED: So you know we're bankrupt. That's hardly news.

RAWLEY: I know a good deal more than that. I know how your ex-wife came to lose her fortune.

NED: No secret there either. I invested in mortgage derivatives.

RAWLEY: And when her show-business friends went bust, you paid them back out of your wife's account. You Ponzied her into bankruptcy. I'm amazed you're still living in an English-speaking country. As for Haskell...I know you're trying to get closer to your son. It's a laudable goal, but this is hardly the way to go about it. He's a brilliant young man and shouldn't be wasting his time on pointless muckraking—(*wince of pain*)...ow...

(RAWLEY *winces at a sudden stab of pain.*)

NED: Rawley? You all right?

RAWLEY: Can you please reach me the call button?

(NED *considers.*)

RAWLEY: I need the nurse.

(NED *doesn't move.*)

RAWLEY: Ned, please ring for the nurse.

(NED doesn't move.)

RAWLEY: Ned, you're already on the hook for fraud. Don't risk a murder charge.

(NED hesitates. Then reaches for the call button. BLANCA answers on the intercom:)

BLANCA: Yes, Mr. Bateson?

RAWLEY: Blanca, could you please come in ? Quickly.

(BLANCA hurries in. RAWLEY is writhing in pain.)

BLANCA: *(to NED)* Sir, you need to leave now.

RAWLEY: He was just going. Ned?

NED: What?

RAWLEY: I'll see you at the wedding.

(NED exits.)

BLANCA: What is it? Are you in pain?

RAWLEY: It's pretty bad, yes.

(BLANCA releases the brake on the bed.)

RAWLEY: What are you doing?

BLANCA: I'm taking you to see Dr. Flanagan. He wants to know, what other operations have you had?

RAWLEY: What do you mean? There weren't any other operations.

BLANCA: Ai. That's not good.

(BLANCA wheels RAWLEY out. Lights down on the hospital room.)

Lights up on a portion of the waiting area as NED enters.)

HASKELL: Dad? How did it go?

NED: It's settled. Done and done.

HASKELL: Is he going to throw you some business?

NED: No.

HASKELL: So are you going to have him arrested?

NED: No, I'm not going to have him arrested..

HASKELL: Why not? It's fraud, isn't it?

NED: I don't know if it's fraud, I'm not a lawyer. Guys like this, they always get off.

HASKELL: Ohmigod. All that stupid time I wasted!

NED: It wasn't wasted. It brought us closer. I value that, even if you don't.

HASKELL: Just don't expect me to go to the wedding.

VALERIE: Did I hear you say wedding?

NED: Yes, there's going to be a wedding. I'm thinking we should have it at the house.

KENDRA: Since when? What did you and Rawley talk about?

NED: We talked shop. We had a very frank discussion.

VALERIE: Ned, she wants details.

NED: The details are secret and will remain a secret. Val, you were dead right about my jealousy. It's my Achilles heel. I'll be proud to call Rawley my son-in-law. (KENDRA *starts out*) Kendra, where are you going?

VALERIE: Sweetheart, wait up.

KENDRA: No. You stay here.

NED: Kendra, he can't have visitors. The nurse ordered me out.

(KENDRA *exits*. VALERIE *starts after her*. NED *restrains VALERIE*..)

VALERIE: (*to NED*) What in heaven's name is going on?

NED: Valerie, for all our sakes: You don't want to get in the middle here.

VALERIE: He bribed you, didn't he.

NED: Call it what you want.

VALERIE: But the wedding is on. I don't have to go on the Home Shopping Network.

NED: Valerie, will you for one second stop thinking about yourself! I've done all I can for this family, I can't do any more!

(Lights down on the waiting area. Lights up on the hospital room. The bed is still gone. BLANCA is looking at the TV.)

TV REPORTER: —We're getting widespread reports of panic, increased admissions to psychiatric hospitals, drugstores running short of anxiety medication—

(KENDRA enters. BLANCA mutes the TV.)

KENDRA: Where's Rawley? What's happening?

BLANCA: He's been to see Dr. Flanagan.

KENDRA: In the O.R.?

BLANCA: In Radiology.

KENDRA: Why? What's going on? What's wrong with him?

BLANCA: That's for Doctor to say.

(BLANCA exits, then re-enters, wheeling RAWLEY into the room.)

RAWLEY: Hello, Kendra.

KENDRA: Oh Rawley. What happened? What did they find?

RAWLEY: Something they never expected to find. Eighteen years, Flanagan never saw anything like it—not in his O.R.

KENDRA: Ohmigod.

RAWLEY: When I came out of Radiology, first thing I heard was, “That’s Flanagan’s sponge patient.”

KENDRA: Sponge patient?

RAWLEY: When they took out my prostate, they forgot to count the sponges. I can’t tell you how relieved I am.

KENDRA: So what happens now? Will you sue?

RAWLEY: Not worth the bother. I’m actually very fond of Flanagan. Not the warmest pair of mittens in the drawer, but he did manage to remove the right organ. They’ll keep me overnight, unzip me in the morning. A story to tell our grandchildren. What’s the matter, Kendra? Did I say something wrong?

KENDRA: I’m just...wondering about my dad.

RAWLEY: What about your dad?

KENDRA: Why he changed his tune so suddenly.

RAWLEY: I told you I could be persuasive. We had a very productive chat.

KENDRA: Yes, he told me.

RAWLEY: Told you what?

KENDRA: (*carefully*) Everything you talked about.

(*Pause.*)

RAWLEY: I asked him not to.

KENDRA: But he did.

RAWLEY: I was afraid you wouldn’t see the humor. That’s why I was so reluctant to tell you.

KENDRA: I’m not sure I do see the humor.

RAWLEY: Well, it began as a lark, more or less. We were trying to light a fire under NASA.

KENDRA: We.

RAWLEY: The board.

KENDRA: Right, of course, the board.

RAWLEY: About the eventual threat.

KENDRA: Right, the eventual threat.

RAWLEY: Rising oceans...global drought...nuclear terrorism... plagues we haven't dreamed of yet...we really ought to be prepared to leave the planet. But the government's strapped, so the private sector has to take up the slack. To attract seed money you need publicity. At the rate they're going, Adastra should be fully capitalized in three years.

KENDRA: And you've been involved in the planning. Every step of the way.

RAWLEY: Well...yes... what else have we been talking about?...*(realizing)* Ned didn't tell you everything?

KENDRA: He didn't tell me anything.

RAWLEY: I see. Nicely played, Kendra. Definitely your mother's daughter. You're not too shocked, are you?

KENDRA: No, actually I'm not shocked.

RAWLEY: And if the End Times come sooner than later, your mother will be on the first flight out.

KENDRA: With the rich and famous.

RAWLEY: Well, how could it be otherwise? You always have to soak the rich. TVs, home computers, hybrid cars—we always field-test on the top two per cent. If we do our jobs right, the cost comes down for everyone. By the time Doomsday rolls around, we hope to be able to evacuate the poor as well as the rich.

KENDRA: Tell me, Rawley: were you sick when you dreamed up this scheme?

RAWLEY: Sick? Come to think of it, yes, I'd just had the biopsy. Why?

KENDRA: You were frightened to death, so you wanted others to be terrified too.

RAWLEY: I hadn't thought of that. I like being seen through by you. I hope you'll make a habit of it. Though in this case I can't see any lasting harm.

KENDRA: The panic...the rioting...the traffic jams...they were inevitable.

RAWLEY: I regret the collateral damage, of course.

KENDRA: And what does my dad get out of this? Why did he change his mind so suddenly?

(RAWLEY *hesitates.*)

RAWLEY: I showed him where his interests lie... (*improvising*)...and your brother's as well... I happen to think Haskell might be right about ETs....What people call God, or Providence, might actually be creatures from another world... observing us...sheltering us from harm...guiding our steps in appropriate directions...Yes, he'll be a great asset to Adastra.

KENDRA: What about my mom?

RAWLEY: What about her?

KENDRA: How did she figure in your calculations?

RAWLEY: Let's say...I was hoping she'd help spread the word.

KENDRA: And if I hadn't had a Hollywood pedigree? Would you have bothered to wine and dine me?

RAWLEY: It works both ways, Kendra. If I'd been as penniless as your clients, would you have given me a second look? Of course not. By the way, my offer to Jason still stands.

KENDRA: I'm afraid Jason doesn't want your help.

RAWLEY: Ah well. We can't all be winners.

(*Pause. RAWLEY lies back in bed, blowing a kiss to KENDRA, who exits. Lights down in the hospital room. Lights up on the waiting area as KENDRA enters.*)

VALERIE: Kendra! Thank God. What's going on?

KENDRA: I have good news and bad news.

VALERIE: Just the good news please.

KENDRA: Rawley's OK.

VALERIE: Oh thank God. What was wrong?

KENDRA: Just a minor surgical mistake. When they sewed him up, they left a sponge.

VALERIE: Oh God, that's so Third World! I guess money doesn't buy everything. All right, what's the bad news?

KENDRA: The celebrity spaceflight has been postponed.

VALERIE: Till when?

KENDRA: Till there's an actual need to leave the planet.

VALERIE: What are you saying? There's no asteroid?

KENDRA: Rawley made it all up. To drum up business for Adastra.

VALERIE: Oh dear. And I told Warren he could be President of Mars. You mean Rawley's part of Adastra?

HASKELL: He's on the board of directors.

VALERIE: So that's why Warren's being so friendly! And Julia? And Tom? That's the only reason they got in touch with me?

KENDRA: You're back on everybody's radar. Isn't that what really counts?

(VALERIE *considers.*)

VALERIE: You're absolutely right. It was totally worth it. And please, darling, try not to judge Rawley too harshly. These moguls are pranksters at heart.

KENDRA: Which is why you'll enjoy working together, Haskell. You and Rawley are a definite match.

HASKELL: Working on what?

KENDRA: With his company, with Adastra, I didn't pump him for details.

HASKELL: Wow. That's awesome.

KENDRA: (*suspiciously*) Ned didn't tell you?

NED: (*quickly*) I, ah, was waiting for the proper moment. But if he told you...yes, it's true.

VALERIE: I guess we're all agreed then. So when is the date? Ned's absolutely right, I think we should have it at the house. We can't afford the Four Seasons...yet. So just the family. And a few friends. Warren and Annette, of course. Rita and Tom. Julia and what's his-name...

(KENDRA has taken off the ring.)

VALERIE: Oh dear. Are you sure? But what happens to your clinic? Your dream clinic? All the clients you could have helped?

KENDRA: They'll just have to go somewhere else.

(Pause. VALERIE snatches the ring out of KENDRA's hand, throws her arms around KENDRA, kisses her.)

VALERIE: I always said you were a saint.

(VALERIE exits.)

HASKELL: Um, Kendra? If you're not marrying Rawley, do I still get the job?

KENDRA: If Rawley wants you, he wants you.

NED: That's good enough for me. Buddy, you ready to go?

HASKELL: Sure, Pops.

NED: *(to KENDRA)* Sweetheart, I'm so sorry about the clinic. I know how much you were counting on it.

HASKELL: *(to KENDRA)* I should be sorry, too. But I'm actually not. Is that OK with you?

KENDRA: Yes, Haskell, that's OK.

(HASKELL starts out, then doubles back, surprising KENDRA with a hug. Keeps hugging. Doesn't let go. Then does. And runs off. Lights down on the waiting area as HASKELL and NED exit.)

Lights up on the hospital room. RAWLEY's dozing. VALERIE appears in the doorway. RAWLEY stirs.)

RAWLEY: Kendra?

VALERIE: Hello, Rawley. I hear those geniuses left a sponge in you.

RAWLEY: Easily remedied. Please—come in. Is Kendra with you?

VALERIE: She's not coming.

RAWLEY: Ah, I see.

VALERIE: It's just us chickens. So what's this I hear? You're the author of those rumors?

RAWLEY: You're not angry with me, are you, Valerie?

VALERIE: Angry? Why would I be angry? You've brought my family together, something no one has ever been able to do. You're giving my son his first paying job, you've healed the rift between Haskell and his dad, and ohmigod, my career...it's back on the rails again!

RAWLEY: Happy to be of service.

VALERIE: But Rawley: When I introduce you to Warren, you won't say too much about the hoax, will you? My friends tend to be anti-corporate. Now what about Kendra?

RAWLEY: Yes, I'm afraid I did ruffle Kendra's feathers.

(VALERIE holds up the ring. Places it on the table between them.)

VALERIE: Where does this leave her clinic?

RAWLEY: It was going to be my wedding present.

VALERIE: And now?

(RAWLEY picks up the ring from the table.)

RAWLEY: If it's all right with Warren, I'd love to see that script.

VALERIE: I'm sure he won't mind a bit.

RAWLEY: No guarantees, of course. The clinic might prove to be the better investment.

VALERIE: That's up to you, of course. Tell me, darling, when did you first realize?

RAWLEY: *(pause)* When you walked into the room just now...instead of your daughter.

VALERIE: Oh don't be so pious, it was way before that.

RAWLEY: Was it?

VALERIE: She should never have introduced us.

RAWLEY: When I said I was a huge fan...I wasn't exaggerating.

VALERIE: You were totally smitten. I knew the minute you waltzed into my house. I'm an actor. We may appear to be all about ourselves, but when it comes to other people's emotions, we seldom miss a trick. Take Kendra, for example. She thinks she's rejected you, but we both know it's the other way around.

RAWLEY: I gave her every chance.

VALERIE: And so did I. Wasn't that selfless of us?

(BLANCA enters.)

BLANCA: Mr. Bateson, Doctor says you must rest up for your surgery. *(to VALERIE)* Visiting hours are over.

RAWLEY: I think we can waive the rules. Flanagan owes me one.

BLANCA: *(doubtfully)* All right. I'll speak to Doctor.

(Lights down on the hospital room as VALERIE perches on RAWLEY's bed.)

(Lights up on the waiting area. DAWN enters, with JASON.)

KENDRA sits up from where she was lying.)

DAWN: I found this poor boy walking back and forth on George Burns Road. Did you two lovebirds have a fight or what?

KENDRA: Yes, we had a fight.

DAWN: Where'd the others go?

KENDRA: Ned and Haskell left.

DAWN: Together? How bizarre. And your mom?

KENDRA: She's with Rawley.

DAWN: Oh. Oh.

KENDRA: And you can stop obsessing about the asteroid. It was all a hoax.

DAWN: (*hint of disappointment*) A hoax?

JASON: Who told you it was a hoax?

KENDRA: Rawley did.

JASON: Rawley told you it was a hoax? (*realizes*) Oh. Wow. Was it a deathbed confession?

KENDRA: He'll be out of the hospital tomorrow.

(KENDRA *says nothing*. JASON *looks at her hand--the missing ring.*)

JASON: (*brightens*) Oh. I see.

DAWN: You know, I never really thought we were all gonna die. It's just, you know, when these disaster things happen, you kinda root for them? Takes your mind off your own stupid problems. Should I wait for Valerie? No.

KENDRA: I think she'll be a while.

DAWN: Knowing Valerie.

KENDRA: You're free to go, Dawn.

DAWN: I'll tell Kate she's been outbid. Bye, Jason. Bye, Kendra. Better luck next time.

JASON: So long, Dawn.

(DAWN *exits.*)

JASON: I guess I'd better be going too. Maybe I'll stop by the Federal Building, check out the demonstrators. Tell them the world isn't ending. You going back to work?

KENDRA: Yeah, that bipolar guy. I still need to find him an apartment.

JASON: You'd better get going then.

KENDRA: Finding homes for homeless people. It's not the most useless job in the world.

JASON: Yeah, I never thought it was.

(Lights down on JASON and KENDRA.

Lights up on the hospital room. VALERIE is on her cell.)

VALERIE: *(into phone)* Julia? It's Valerie. Fantastic news...I think I can guarantee us a place on the space ship...Yes, but listen, and I have this on the very highest authority, there's no immediate danger... No, not for years and years and years...Maybe not in our lifetimes....

(Lights down on VALERIE and RAWLEY.

Lights up on JASON and KENDRA. Two ALIENS have joined them in the waiting room. They're not exactly Haskell's Halloween Alien, but not all that different.)

(The ALIENS are escorting KENDRA and JASON toward the exit.)

JASON: Are you parked downstairs?

KENDRA: Oh yikes, it's gonna be the maximum.

JASON: You need any money?

(JASON and KENDRA check their wallets.)

KENDRA: Can you lend me a twenty?

JASON: Yeah, I think so.

KENDRA: You got enough?

JASON: Yeah, just.

(JASON gives her a twenty.)

KENDRA: I'll pay you next time I see you.

JASON: No worries.

(JASON starts to exit ahead of KENDRA. One of the ALIENS gently bars his way.)

KENDRA: How about tonight?

(Lights up on VALERIE and RAWLEY. They've also been joined by two ALIENS. One of the Aliens is helping RAWLEY slip the ring on VALERIE's finger.)

VALERIE: *(on phone)*...There's going to be a wedding, yes...Well, of course you'll be invited...You and Warren and Annette and Tom and Rita...Only my nearest and dearest... No, are you joking? Me on the Home Shopping Network? Never! Not in a million years! Where on earth did you hear that? God, these rumors!

(As the ALIENS in the waiting room gently urge JASON and KENDRA together, one of the ALIENS at RAWLEY's bedside has been guiding VALERIE's free hand under the bedsheet. JASON and KENDRA kiss. RAWLEY stares in the direction of his crotch. Suddenly brightens. Blackout. END OF PLAY.)