

# **No More Than Reason**

*by Louise Penberthy*

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## Synopsis:

What do we learn about love when we 're older that we don't know when we're younger? Liz and Daniel, two actors in their 50s and long-time friends, start rehearsals as Beatrice and Benedick in "Much Ado About Nothing." They renew their friendship during rehearsals, disagree about the play, help each other through rough patches, fight and make up. Then, backstage during a performance, Liz tells Daniel that her third husband is leaving her, and she's decided to give up on marriage. Daniel, to her surprise as well as his, tells her he loves her and will leave his 20-year marriage for her. Their equilibrium upset, Liz and Daniel navigate through the complexities of love to... not a happy ending, but a hopeful one.

## Cast:

LIZ – early 50s, playing Beatrice in "Much Ado About Nothing"  
DANIEL – early 50s, playing Benedick in "Much Ado About Nothing"  
MELISSA – mid 20s, the director  
AMBER – early 30s, the stage manager and fight choreographer  
CHARLOTTE – late 40s, Daniel's wife  
BARRY (voice) – mid 20s, lighting designer  
PRINCE (voice)  
MESSENGER (voice)

## Time:

Present day

## Location:

In and around a theater.

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Scene 1. Before rehearsal, a few days into the rehearsal process for “Much Ado about Nothing.” In or around a medium-sized fringe theater of some standing. Liz and Daniel are waiting for rehearsal to start, arguing about what happened between Beatrice and Benedick in the past.

LIZ. Here’s what happened. They fell in love, only he broke off. And now, 30 years later, she’s realized the mistake they made, only he won’t see it. She’s trying to get him to see what a fool he’s been.

DANIEL. We don’t know he broke it off.

LIZ. And to apologize for how badly he treated her.

DANIEL. It could have been either of them. Or both.

LIZ. Except she’s wary – naturally – of how he’s going to treat her.

DANIEL. She broke it off when he went to war.

LIZ. Then why did he go to war?

DANIEL. He was a soldier. He *is* a soldier.

LIZ. He chose to be a soldier.

DANIEL. Right, but – what happened is, they were in love, and she pulled away because she wasn’t willing to love a soldier. She wouldn’t risk him getting killed in battle and being left alone. She made the mistake.

LIZ. He deceived her. He won her heart “of false dice.” She says, where Don Pedro says, “Come Lady come...”

DANIEL. “Come Lady come, you have lost the heart of Signior Benedick,” right.

LIZ. “Indeed my Lord, he lent it me a while, and I gave him good use for it, a double heart for his single one” – see, he initiated it, he made overtures of love –

DANIEL. Right, right –

LIZ. “Marry once before he won it of me, of false dice” – he treated her badly –

DANIEL. Right –

LIZ. “Therefore your Grace may well say I have lost it.”

DANIEL. Right, but his take is, she was a nag and a harpy, and every time he comes home on leave, she attacks him. She looks forward to him coming home, so she can start fights with him.

LIZ. That's because he's the only one with any wit in the place.

DANIEL. Not entirely true.

LIZ. He starts fights, too. And he fights dirty.

DANIEL. "Old age and treachery."

LIZ. Old age? We're not that old!

DANIEL. Benedick is starting to feel creaky. He's got bad knees –

LIZ. Creepy?

DANIEL. Creaky. His knees creak, and he's had a hernia operation, and all the young soldiers party all night and still fight all day.

LIZ. Yeah, and he's got to get his eight hours of sleep. In any case, they had something going on when they were young, but it ended. That's not specific. But *they* wouldn't agree on it.

DANIEL. I always assumed that I'd play Benedick when I was in my 30s. I auditioned, what, three or four times? The worst was when they said, "The good news is, we're casting you. The bad news is, it's not Benedick."

LIZ. (*Nodding.*) Once I passed 30, 35, I figured I'd never get cast. It's more interesting now. She has had longer to get into patterns of behavior, and disappointments and anger have gotten set in place.

DANIEL. Yeah, Benedict's older now. He's more battle hardened. He's lonely.

LIZ. Lonely? He's friends with Don Pedro, and Claudio.

DANIEL. He's seen a lot of his buddies die.

LIZ. Right. He would have.

They've been quarreling for 30 years. Can you imagine? By the time Richard and I have been married that long, we'll be in our 70s! You and Charlotte have been married almost that long.

DANIEL. Not that long.

LIZ. Well, a long time.

DANIEL. But we don't fight much. We work things out.

LIZ. Yeah, I know. I'm working on it, really, I am. I'm not being clingy this time.

DANIEL. I wasn't saying anything.

LIZ. I'm letting him be on his own. Well, I kind of have to, he's working such long hours. But I am.

Playing Beatrice is a dream. She takes such a great journey. I've played one too many static characters lately.

DANIEL. You took a journey in "Steel Magnolias."

LIZ. You saw that?

DANIEL. Next to last weekend. The Saturday. I would've said hi, but you were with a bunch of people.

LIZ. That was the night my friends from work came.

DANIEL. You saved that show.

LIZ. God.

Thanks.

The director was good with stage composition, and that was about it. Benedict takes a great journey, too.

DANIEL. He does.

LIZ. What makes him unbend?

DANIEL. He realizes he can't be a soldier much longer. He's traveled throughout the world, and he's never met any woman like Beatrice. She's his match.

LIZ. Yeah. She's got the wit, she's got the intelligence, she's got the...

DANIEL. Spark.

LIZ. Spark. She can use language just like the men in Shakespeare. Appropriate the other person's words, use them to make her own points, one-up anyone.

DANIEL. Except Benedick. He always wins.

LIZ. He does not.

DANIEL. Or else he lets her win.

LIZ. You're enjoying this.

DANIEL. Hey, I enjoy a lively conversation as much as Benedick.

LIZ. See, you and Charlotte should argue sometimes. It's fun.

DANIEL. Charlotte's not the arguing type. You know that.

LIZ. Except in court.

DANIEL. She doesn't do so much trial work anymore. She's big on using mediation now.

LIZ. Wait, when was your anniversary?  
I missed it.

DANIEL. Yeah.

LIZ. Well, congratulations. 20 years.

DANIEL. 20 years.

LIZ. For a while there, I thought it would never be able to stay married as long as 20 years.

*(LIZ checks her cell phone.)*

DANIEL. You expecting a call? You keep checking your phone.

LIZ. He's working so much, we try to check in once or twice a day, just keep in touch. That was Melissa.

*(LIZ checks her voicemail.)*

LIZ. There was an accident, so she's stuck in traffic. She'll get here soon as she can. Anyhow, as usual, his manager set an insane deadline, so the programmers suffer. He must be in a meeting. I'll call him during break.  
What were we talking about?

DANIEL. I was going to ask you what your take is on Beatrice's financial situation. Is she dependent on her uncle, or does she have her own money?

LIZ. I'm playing with some back story for her. What if she'd been married before? It's not in the text. But I'm working with Benedick goes off to war, she's a poor dependent on her uncle, so she marries some man who's got money. And it's an unhappy marriage, so that's part of the reason she's scornful and dismissive of marriage in general.

DANIEL. Interesting. Except if she's married, why would Don Pedro think of getting them to fall in love with each other?

LIZ. Oh, he died.

DANIEL. See, I thought Beatrice stayed at home, pining for Benedick.

LIZ. Not pining. Bitter, maybe.

DANIEL. I think she locks herself up in her room and writes "Beatrice plus Benedick equals love," over and over.

LIZ. Oh, come on now.

DANIEL. She leans over backwards into the well, so she can see the face of her true love.

LIZ. Yeah, in Benedick's dreams!

DANIEL. And she's mean to him in this scene. When they're dancing.

LIZ. She's mean to him?

DANIEL. Can't you tell how crushed he is?

LIZ. He tells her he's heard this unkind stuff about her. That she's a bitch, and she's cribbed all of her wit out of some book. And he won't... and she says, "Will you not tell me who told you so?"

DANIEL. *(As Benedick.)* "No, you shall pardon me."

LIZ. "Nor will you not tell me who you are?"

DANIEL. "Not now."

*(Lighting change. They are in rehearsal. MELISSA is there.)*

LIZ. That I was disdainful, and that I had my good wit out of the hundred merry tales: well, this was Signior Benedick that said so.

DANIEL. What's he?

LIZ. I am sure you know him well enough.

DANIEL. Not I, believe me.

LIZ. Did he never make you laugh?

DANIEL. I pray you what is he?

MELISSA. Stop a minute, guys. Liz. Start toying with him more. And be meaner.

LIZ. *(Continuing in character.)* Did he never make you laugh?

DANIEL. I pray you what is he?

LIZ. Why he is the prince's jester, a very dull fool, only his gift is, in devising impossible slanders, none but libertines delight in him, and the commendation is not in his wit, but in his villainy for he both pleaseth men and angers them, and then they laugh at him, and beat him: I am sure he is in the fleet, I would he had boarded me.

*(The actress playing Melissa will say the following two lines on impulse.)*

MELISSA. Even meaner. Enjoy it.

DANIEL. When I know the gentleman, I'll tell him what you say.      MELISSA. Better.

LIZ. Do, do, he'll but break a comparison or two on me, which peradventure (not marked, or not laughed at) strikes him into melancholy and then there's a partridge wing saved, for the fool will eat no supper that night. We must follow the leaders.

DANIEL. In every good thing.

*(Music for a pavane, a stately medieval dance, starts to play. They begin to dance, but DANIEL soon makes a wrong step. They start over, but he makes another mistake.)*

DANIEL. Dammit, I keep forgetting to change feet there.

LIZ. What's wrong with the feet you have?

DANIEL. Ha ha.

LIZ. Like this.

*(She leads him through the steps of the dance.)*

LIZ. You never could dance, could you.

DANIEL. You know me. I'm a lousy dancer.

LIZ. Jesus. I don't remember you being this bad.

DANIEL. You're getting old. You're losing your memory.

LIZ. At least I can remember the dance.

Scene 2. Amber is coaching Daniel on a fight scene.

*(DANIEL and AMBER go through the first phrase of the fight. They both have a rapier and a dagger, and the fight is full of slashing, slashing, thrusting, and parrying with both weapons, until they are tangled up, each trying to push the other away from them. Finally DANIEL succeeds, but AMBER pivots back towards him and nearly runs him through his right arm with her rapier. He blocks with his dagger. They disengage.)*

AMBER. Good. That's better. Just, when you feint to my groin, get around to the reverse thrust to my two quicker. And that last parry is a beat parry.

DANIEL. Right.

AMBER. Let's do it again.

*(They go through the sequence again, Daniel correcting the mistakes he made the first time. While they're working, LIZ enters. When they finish:)*

AMBER. Good. How's that feel?

DANIEL. Good. I think I'm getting that one part.

AMBER. Yeah. That's solid now.  
Hey, Liz.

LIZ. Hey. Where's Jack?

AMBER. Out sick.

DANIEL. Liz! Come hug me!

LIZ. God, no. You're all sweaty and shit.  
Mind if I watch?

AMBER. Fine with me.

DANIEL. It's really fucked up and vicious. You'll like it.

AMBER. Hey, Liz. Let me teach you Jack's part in this next bit. I want to watch Daniel doing it.

LIZ. Sure. Absolutely.

*(LIZ quickly picks up three or four moves of the fight. LIZ is as good at stage combat as DANIEL is, or even better. LIZ and DANIEL run through the phase of the fight, AMBER coaching DANIEL.)*

Scene 3. On break during a rehearsal, a few days later.

DANIEL. You think this is working as a war play?

LIZ. You know, I think it is. I was worried at first. There's enough in the text itself that propels the action, adding war seemed like too much baggage.

DANIEL. I've never seen this done as a war play.

LIZ. I've always seen it as a bucolic romp through the Sicilian countryside. I wonder what Melissa and all of them know about war. They're all so young.

DANIEL. Bunch of kids out of theater school, starting a company.

LIZ. Bless their energy. I hope they know how to do war right. I want them to make it as real and brutal as possible.

DANIEL. It makes a different play. The sadness of love in war time.

LIZ. A sort of desperate R&R. Hero as a war bride.

DANIEL. Beatrice as a war bride.

LIZ. Beatrice isn't a war bride. You have to be young to be a war bride. And French.  
I wish she'd let the women fight.

DANIEL. You love stage combat.

LIZ. In the battle you guys are having at the beginning. I do love it, and I never get to do it.

DANIEL. I'd take you. In a fight.

LIZ. In your dreams.  
I'm enjoying working on this.

DANIEL. Me, too.

LIZ. I'm glad we're working together.

DANIEL. Yeah?

LIZ. Working on something really good.

DANIEL. Me, too. It's been a long time since we worked on something really good together.

LIZ. I'm sorry I dropped out of sight there for a while.

DANIEL. That's okay.

LIZ. Richard and I were having problems.

DANIEL. I understand.

LIZ. But I shouldn't have just abandoned our friendship.

DANIEL. It's okay. You've done it before.

LIZ. I have?

DANIEL. Every so often.

LIZ. I'm sorry. I didn't realize.

DANIEL. Liz. Stop apologizing. I was sorry we didn't seem to be friends for a while, but we're friends again. Right?

LIZ. Right. Thanks.

DANIEL. You're welcome. Now. Help me work on this speech.

"I do much wonder that one man, seeing how much another man is a fool when he dedicates his behaviors to love, will become the argument of his own –"

LIZ. (*Interrupting; DANIEL has skipped some text.*) "Will after he hath laughed..."

DANIEL. "When he dedicates his behaviors to love, will after he hath laughed at such shallow follies in others, become the argument of his own scorn by falling in love – and such a man is Claudio. I have known when there was no music with him but the drum and the fife, and now..."

LIZ. Sorry. Sorry.

I do need to apologize to you. No, listen.

I do drop out of sight. I abandon our friendship. And you've just been my friend again, afterwards, every time. And you never reproach me.

And then you're there for me when I need you.

I'm sorry. I won't do it again.

DANIEL. Thanks. Thank you.

LIZ. Do you need anything? Right now?

It's okay if you don't.

DANIEL. Just to know that we're friends again.

LIZ. That's all?

Yes. Friends again. Always.

DANIEL. Friends.

LIZ. Your speech.

DANIEL. "I have known when there was no music with him but the drum and the fife, and now would he rather hear –"

LIZ. "Had he rather..."

DANIEL. "And now had he rather hear the tabor and the pipe. I have known when he would have walked ten mile a-foot, to see a good armour..."

*(DANIEL is trying to massage his right shoulder.)*

DANIEL. "...and now will he lie ten nights awake carving the fashion of a new doublet. He was wont to speak plain, and to the purpose (like an honest man and a soldier)..."  
I pulled something in my shoulder during fight rehearsal last night.

LIZ. Where?

DANIEL. Here. And down my arm.

*(LIZ begins to massage DANIEL'S shoulder.)*

LIZ. Too hard?

DANIEL. No. No, that's good.

"He was wont to speak plain, and to the purpose (like an honest man and a soldier), and now is he turned orthography. His words are a very fantastical banquet..."

LIZ. *(Prompting.)* "Just so many..."

DANIEL. "...just so many strange dishes. May I be so converted, and see with these eyes? I cannot tell; I think not. I will not be sworn, but love may transform me to an oyster, but I'll take my oath on it, till he have made an oyster of me, he shall never make me such a fool."

"Oyster." Why an oyster?

LIZ. Closed up, tight-lipped, like a melancholy lover.

DANIEL. Makes sense.

LIZ. How's that?

DANIEL. That's great, thanks.

LIZ. I should do the other shoulder, too, so you don't get unbalanced.

DANIEL. Too late.

Go ahead, laugh. See if I care.

LIZ. We wouldn't want you to be unbalanced.

*(LIZ massages DANIEL'S other shoulder.)*

DANIEL. "One woman is fair, yet I am well. Another is wise, yet I am well. Another virtuous, yet I am well. But till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in my grace."

Scene 4. Before rehearsal, a week later. Melissa and Amber talking.

AMBER. How long has Daniel been married?

MELISSA. I don't know. Ages. Why?

AMBER. During break last night, I overheard him talking on his phone to his wife.

MELISSA. Okay. And?

AMBER. Something was weird. He was being careful with her. I could sort of hear her, too, and she didn't sound happy with him.

MELISSA. I hope things are all right.

Is the fight nasty and vicious enough for them? Liz and Daniel.

AMBER. They love it.

MELISSA. Good.

Every time I talk about the war aspect, I can see these looks on their faces. I can tell they think I have no idea what the fuck they're talking about. When they make all these suggestions. I do understand, it's just I have different ideas. This is still Shakespeare, you know, not... what was that movie they were talking about?

AMBER. "Apocalypse Now." And they're not that judgmental.

MELISSA. It's not like either of them has ever been to war. Neither of them has ever been in combat.

AMBER. How's Chris?

MELISSA. The same. I talked to my mom last night. He sits around and won't talk to anyone.

He was so great when we were kids. He picked on me, of course, he was totally an older brother. But God! My first year of junior high, there was this girl who was bullying me. So he taught me how to defend myself. One day she started this typical girl fight, you know, the nasty hair-pulling shit. I just punched her in the jaw. Broke a bone in my hand, but she was so shocked she just stopped and stared at me. I was screaming and screaming at her, you know, leave me the fuck alone, bitch, and then the vice principal came hustling his fat self up, and that was that.

But I don't see any trace of that part of him anymore.

AMBER. Does he have a buddy who could visit him?

MELISSA. Most of them died. In the same attack.

AMBER. Oh. Right.

MELISSA. I don't care that the play isn't really about war. I don't understand how they could say they couldn't really be in love under these circumstances.

AMBER. I don't think they're saying –

MELISSA. It's going to work. I wish they would just trust me that last little bit.

AMBER. You should tell them what you just told me.

MELISSA. I have. Over and over. You've been there.

AMBER. What you just told me about Chris.

MELISSA. No, that's not the point.

*(Silence.)*

AMBER. Daniel and Liz are working together well. They seemed awkward at first. I wonder if they've ever slept together.

MELISSA. Eww.

AMBER. What do you mean, eww? You cast them as lovers, you must think –

MELISSA. They're my parents' age.

AMBER. *(Continuing.)* – that they might be – that people that age can be sexually attracted to each other.

MELISSA. Yeah, but... What makes you think they've slept together?

AMBER. I don't. I just wonder. They've been friends for so long, maybe they just tried it once.

MELISSA. People that old don't have friends with benefits.

AMBER. I suppose not.

*(LIZ enters.)*

LIZ. Hi, guys! I'm so sorry I'm late. Did you get my message?

MELISSA. Yeah, that's fine. No problem.

LIZ. Did I interrupt something?

AMBER. No, no, we were just chatting.

LIZ. Where's Daniel?

MELISSA. He called to say he's got some kind of stomach flu. He can't make it tonight.

LIZ. Oh.

MELISSA. He thinks it's just a 24-hour thing.

LIZ. Oh. Okay. Crap, I wanted to work on that scene.

MELISSA. It's okay, we'll reorganize the schedule. Tonight we can work on your monologue.

LIZ. "What fire is in mine ears?"

MELISSA. Yeah.

LIZ. I'm not off book for it.

MELISSA. No problem. We'll just do what we can.

LIZ. What's so funny?

Scene 5. Rehearsal for act II, scene iii. Melissa, Liz, and Daniel.

LIZ. Daniel and I were talking before you got here, and we have an idea. We think there should be a place where she sews up his leg. Because the stitches have come out.

MELISSA. Oh. That's interesting. Why?

LIZ. If we are going to be gory and gritty, let's be gory and gritty. Beatrice and Benedick wooing over blood and bandages.

DANIEL. Wouldn't that be fucked and awesome?

LIZ. We could put it in the scene where I ask him what Claudio said to his challenge.

DANIEL. I could have called for her to come help me.

LIZ. It'd be great for us to have our first love scene while I'm causing him pain.

MELISSA. Um... let me think about it. It's an interesting idea, just let me think about it. It may be too much for what I'm trying to do in this scene.

LIZ. Okay.

MELISSA. I'll think about it.

All right. So. Benedick's in the garden. The guys have just left, blah blah blah, Benedick has his speech "Love me! why it must be requited." And Beatrice enters.

BENEDICK. Here comes Beatrice: by this day, she's a fair Lady, I do spy some marks of love in her.

BEATRICE. Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner.

BENEDICK. Fair Beatrice, I thank you for your pains.

BEATRICE. I took no more pains for those thanks, than you take pains to thank me, if it had been painful, I would not have come.

BENEDICK. You take pleasure then in the message.

BEATRICE. Yea just so much as you may take upon the knife's point, and to choke a daw withal: you have no stomach signior, fare you well.

*(BEATRICE exits.)*

BENEDICK. Ha, against my will I am sent to bid you come to dinner: there's a double meaning in that...

MELISSA. Good. Good.

Let's do it again. Daniel, this time, I want you to find the teenager in him.

DANIEL. The teenager?

MELISSA. Yeah, the giddy part. Your youthful ardor.

DANIEL. Okay.

MELISSA. Liz, you, too. Let's go again.

LIZ. But she hasn't been tricked yet. Into believing he loves her.

MELISSA. Sure, but there's something about how he talks to her, it stirs something in her.

LIZ. Okay.

*(They do the scene again, but it doesn't work. Both are playing much younger than they are.)*

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BENEDICK. You take pleasure then in the message.

BEATRICE. Yea just so much as you may take upon the knife's point, and to choke a daw withal: you have no stomach signior, fare you well.

BENEDICK. Ha, against my will I am sent to bid you...

MELISSA. Good. Only, be sure you stay grounded. Your voices are creeping up into your upper register. Let's go again.

Scene 6. A few days later. Daniel and Liz at a coffee house before rehearsal.

LIZ. Richard and I had a fight last night. Actually, I was trying to talk and he was being *reasonable*.

DANIEL. You'd get more if you talked less.

LIZ. I know. Give him space. I try. But I hate it when he's reasonable.  
I admire how you and Charlotte get along. You never argue.

DANIEL. Sure we do. Not much anymore. We've gotten to this equilibrium.

LIZ. That's nice. Not having to work so hard.

DANIEL. We have plateaus. Well, we have one now.

LIZ. How long has it lasted?

DANIEL. About a year.

LIZ. A whole year.

DANIEL. No, longer. Three years. Maybe more.

LIZ. My plateaus have always been between marriages.  
We'll get over this. We always do.

*(Pause.)*

DANIEL. You have some foam on your nose.

LIZ. Did I get it?

DANIEL. Yeah.

LIZ. God, I don't want to rehearse. I wish I could just go home and curl up on the sofa and wrap myself in an afghan. For some reason I'm feeling like crap these days.

DANIEL. Well, it's the anniversary. Of your mom's death.

LIZ. But it's been seven years. I didn't feel like this last year. Or the year before.  
You're right.

DANIEL. Some years are worse than others.

LIZ. I can't believe I didn't realize. But yeah, in two weeks it'll be seven years.  
I should call my stepdad.  
Sometimes I forget how much I miss her. I guess I've gotten used to her being gone. Not "used to"...

DANIEL. Inured.

LIZ. It's weird. I never thought I would *not* miss her. You know?

DANIEL. Yeah.

LIZ. She was so funny. She'd come to all my shows, and she'd pick apart the direction.

DANIEL. We all went out for dessert that one time after "Death of a Salesman," and she completely ripped it up.

LIZ. God, that production sucked.

DANIEL. It did.

LIZ. The critics were brutal.

DANIEL. Especially to you.

LIZ. I deserved it.

DANIEL. No, you didn't.

LIZ. You always say that.

We went out for a drink the day the review came out, and I bitched and bitched. Remember?

DANIEL. Oh, yeah.

LIZ. And I bitched about Howard, too.

DANIEL. You bitched a lot about Howard.

LIZ. What a mistake that was. I was well rid of him.

DANIEL. We should go.

*(They gather their things to go.)*

LIZ. You know, I'm glad she didn't linger. It was hard that she went so quickly, but she was so debilitated. She would have hated it.

DANIEL. She would have.

LIZ. Not being able to talk, not being able to take care of herself.

Thank you for reminding me. I mean that. I feel better now that I know what's going on.

DANIEL. You're welcome. I'm glad you feel better.

LIZ. Maybe I'll call my step-dad during break tonight.

DANIEL. And your sister.

LIZ. Yeah.

DANIEL. What we were talking about earlier, we should talk to Melissa tonight.

LIZ. We should. I love her to death, she's a rare young woman, but she's not directing us like we're in our 50s.

DANIEL. She has a great idea, she doesn't know what to do with us.  
What are you humming?

LIZ. "Teenager in Love." Oh God.

*(They laugh.)*

Scene 7. Rehearsing act four, scene one. Melissa is directing, Amber is stage managing. Daniel and Liz are trying hard to play “in love” and a lightheartedness that neither of them believes is right for the scene.

BENEDICK. Surely I do believe your fair cousin is wronged.

BEATRICE. Ah, how much might the man deserve of me that would right her!

BENEDICK. Is there any way to show such friendship?

BEATRICE. A very even way, but no such friend.

BENEDICK. May a man do it?

BEATRICE. It is a man’s office, but not yours.

MELISSA. Liz, don’t pull away there. And let him wipe away your tears.

LIZ. Okay.

BENEDICK. May a man do it?

BEATRICE. It is a man’s office, but not yours.

BENEDICK. I do love nothing in the world so well as you, is not that strange?

MELISSA. Not so gruff, Daniel.

BENEDICK. I do love nothing in the world so well as you, is not that strange?

BEATRICE. As strange as the thing I know not, it were as possible for me to say I loved nothing so well as you, but I confess nothing, nor I deny nothing...

AMBER. (*Prompting.*) “It were as possible for me to say I loved nothing so well as you, but believe me not, and yet I lie not...”

BEATRICE. As strange as the thing I know not, it were as possible for me to say I loved nothing so well as you, but believe me not, and yet I lie not, I confess nothing, nor I deny nothing, I am sorry for my cousin.

BENEDICK. I protest I love thee.

BEATRICE. You have stayed me in a happy hour, I was about to protest I loved you.

BENEDICK. And do it with all your heart.

BEATRICE. I love you with so much of my heart, that none is left to protest.

BENEDICK. Come, bid me do any thing for thee.

BEATRICE. Kill Claudio.

BENEDICK. Ha, not for the wide world.

MELISSA. Guys, let's go back. I want you to kiss at that point.

LIZ. Here?

MELISSA. After your, "I love you with so much of my heart."

LIZ. What kind of kiss?

MELISSA. Well, you guys have just declared your love for each other. That kind of kiss.

LIZ. But in the context of the scene, right? My cousin has just been dishonored and jilted at the altar.

MELISSA. It's the kiss of two people who've been in love with each other all their lives.

LIZ. You mean, full-on passionate?

MELISSA. *(Continuing.)* And they're finally showing it. *(Replying to LIZ.)* Yeah.

DANIEL. A kiss could work, but not passionate. I love Beatrice, but I know something's wrong and I want to figure it out.

LIZ. And I'm worried about Hero. And I'm furious with Claudio. We're distracted.

MELISSA. Look, guys, I know you've been friends for ages. Is it just too weird?

LIZ. Is what too weird?

MELISSA. Kissing each other.

LIZ. God, no, that's not it.

DANIEL. I don't have any problem kissing her.

MELISSA. We can ease into it, if you want.

LIZ. We could kiss each other for the whole rest of the play, but that wouldn't solve the problem.

DANIEL. It'd be fun.

*(AMBER pretends to make a note.)*

AMBER. "They kiss for the rest of the play."

MELISSA. Guys, we have to have a scene that shows Beatrice and Benedick happy with each other, in love and all that. Otherwise, no one will believe at the end that they really love each other.

DANIEL. We could do a simple kiss. A kiss of honor.

MELISSA. A what?

DANIEL. Like two soldiers saluting each other in battle.

What I want, what Benedick wants, is to honor Beatrice for her strength and courage. Even when she's furious, and afraid for Hero, she's able to battle with Benedick to keep from surrendering to love. This scene is the two of them trying to overcome thirty years of anger and hurt.

MELISSA. But that's what I want. Love, you know, in the middle of war. That's how I see this play, that's how I'm trying to do it. We have to believe that people who've been scarred by war, when they've had horrible times in war, that they can find love again. That's what this production is all about. We have to reach people who think that war destroys everything, that it destroys their hearts and they can't be mended. We have to show them that they can.

LIZ. So... is this about Chris?

MELISSA. It's about all of them. They come back from Iraq and Afghanistan and all those places – if they come back at all – and they are angry, and brittle, and they're always staring out as though the enemy is still out there, or, or like they're trying not to see all of the horrible shit they've seen and it's, like, burned on their eyes anyway. I want to... burn something new on their eyes. Something hopeful. Something that gives them hope, that shows them who they could be. Not the shit hole they're in now.

AMBER. How would he fall in love?

MELISSA. He can't. They fucking took that away from him.

AMBER. But how would he fall in love?

Melissa. It's not about Chris!

Oh my God.

Okay, I'm throwing out all this shit and starting again.

First thing, we're going to add all the dialogue back in. All the stuff I cut.

LIZ. The swearing and eating part?

MELISSA. All of it. Every last fricking word. Why don't you guys go over it. I have to do some thinking.

(To AMBER.) The love has to be buried, it has to be... You were right, by the way.

AMBER. That's what I'm here for.

*DANIEL and LIZ step to one side,  
and begin to run lines.)*

MELISSA. So. We have to see the love  
breaking through their shell.

DANIEL. Lady Beatrice, have you wept all  
this while?

AMBER. Through each other's shell?

LIZ. Yea, and I will weep a while longer.

MELISSA. No, no... yes, but from the  
inside. Struggling. It has to be burning  
inside them.

DANIEL. I will not desire that.

LIZ. You have no reason, I do it freely.

*(LIZ and DANIEL continue running lines until MELISSA and  
AMBER finish their lines. Wherever LIZ and DANIEL are when  
MELISSA and AMBER finish, the following occurs:  
Lighting change. It is later in the rehearsal process, and they are  
doing the scene well. BENEDICK is struggling against his  
thousand-yard stare, BEATRICE is struggling with being a  
capable, adult woman, unable in her world to avenge her cousin  
herself. BEATRICE is crying. BENEDICK hands her a  
handkerchief.)*

BENEDICK. Surely I do believe your fair cousin is wronged.

BEATRICE. Ah, how much might the man deserve of me that would right her!

BENEDICK. Is there any way to show such friendship?

BEATRICE. *(Ending the conversation.)* A very even way, but no such friend.

BENEDICK. *(But he keeps going:)* May a man do it?

BEATRICE. It is a man's office, but not yours.

BENEDICK. *(Gruffly.)* I do love nothing in the world so well as you, is not that strange?

*(She looks at him, astonished. He looks back. It is strange.)*

BEATRICE. As strange as ... *(Is about to say she loves him too.)* the thing I know not, it  
were as possible for me to say I loved nothing so well as you *(Wanting not to say it but  
wanting to all the same:)*, but believe me not, and yet I lie not, I confess nothing, nor I  
deny nothing *(Trying to cover for herself.)*, I am sorry for my cousin.

BENEDICK. By my sword, Beatrice, thou lovest me.

BEATRICE. Do not swear by it and eat it.

BENEDICK. I will swear by it that you love me, and I will make him eat it that says I  
love not you.

BEATRICE. Will you not eat your word?

BENEDICK. With no sauce that can be devised to it, I protest I love thee.

BEATRICE. Why then, God forgive me.

BENEDICK. What offense sweet Beatrice?

BEATRICE. You have stayed me in a happy hour, I was about to protest I loved you.

BENEDICK. And do it with all thy heart.

BEATRICE. I love you with so much of my heart, that none is left to protest.

*(BENEDICK reaches out his arm for BEATRICE to clasp, soldier fashion.)*

BENEDICK. Come bid me do anything for thee.

*(Silence. Then lighting change. After rehearsal. MELISSA has left.)*

AMBER. Great work tonight, you guys.

DANIEL. You, too. Awesome suggestion.

LIZ. It opened the scene right up.

AMBER. Thanks. Yeah, in that moment, I just thought, Chris is the key to all of this.  
See you guys tomorrow.

DANIEL. Good night.

LIZ. Good night.

*(AMBER exits.)*

LIZ. Thank God.

DANIEL. Yeah?

LIZ. Melissa's finally directing us like we're our age. And the scene has guts now.

DANIEL. I'm glad you said something.

LIZ. I hope she lets us keep that bit where I take your rapier.

DANIEL. You like weapons.

LIZ. Love them.

DANIEL. Bloodthirsty wench.

LIZ. You know it.

DANIEL. You want to go out for a quick drink?

LIZ. Thanks, I can't. I've got to go home and spend some quality time with Richard. No, no, no, not that kind of quality time. But he's feeling neglected. Rain check?

DANIEL. Whine, whine, Charlotte's away on a business trip and I'm all alone.

LIZ. I'm sorry. I wish I could. This weekend. When's she coming back?

DANIEL. Friday.

LIZ. Whine, whine, indeed. That's only two days away.

DANIEL. I know.

LIZ. See you tomorrow. Oh, wait, you're not here tomorrow.

DANIEL. Saturday.

LIZ. See you Saturday.

DANIEL. See you.

Scene 8. A few days later. Daniel is walking Liz to her car after rehearsal.

LIZ. I'm hoping she'll look at colleges around here.

DANIEL. She's old enough to go to college?

LIZ. She'll be 19 next month.

DANIEL. 19?

LIZ. Can you believe it? There are a couple places around here I think would be perfect for her. So I've told her she can come up here, stay for a long weekend or something, and we can drive around and check them out.

DANIEL. That would be awesome.

LIZ. It would be.

DANIEL. You know what would be perfect for her, if she wants to do math, is my alma mater.

LIZ. That's one of the places I want her to look at.

While she's here, I'd like us to do something. The three of us.

DANIEL. I'd like that.

LIZ. She's always liked you.

DANIEL. Can't imagine why.

LIZ. Me, neither. We could have dinner or something. I'll see what she wants to do.

DANIEL. Will she get to see the show?

LIZ. Maybe. I hope so.

DANIEL. So what do you think of the nightmare scene? You watched it tonight, right?

LIZ. I did. I liked it. It makes sense, Benedick would have PTSD.

DANIEL. Is it gory and gritty enough for you?

LIZ. I don't know about gory, but gritty, yes. The ghosts would have to come out with buckets of blood for it to be gory enough.

DANIEL. That would be a mess.

Before you got there, Amber suggested that you be one of the ghosts.

LIZ. Beatrice in Benedick's nightmares? That'd make the next scene kind of creepy, because the guys are convincing Benedick that Beatrice is in love with him.

DANIEL. Seriously creepy.

LIZ. I never think of soldiers in Shakespeare's time having PTSD.

DANIEL. They must have. PTSD must go as far back as there's been war.

LIZ. Their kind of war seems like nothing compared to ours. Swords and cannons versus IED's and AK-47s.

DANIEL. Do you know what happened to Melissa's brother?

LIZ. He was in Iraq. He lost a leg to an IED.

DANIEL. Jesus.

LIZ. Yeah.

DANIEL. How's he doing?

LIZ. Not well. He won't use his prosthetic, he won't go to therapy, he's depressed. He'll talk to Melissa some, but that's it.

DANIEL. How long has he been back?

LIZ. About five months.

Your dad still doesn't talk about Korea, does he?

DANIEL. Never. With his buddies, but that's it.

*(They are quiet for a while.)*

DANIEL. I'm glad we're doing this together.

LIZ. Me, too. It's been a while. I'm so glad Melissa went with you instead of Ed.

DANIEL. What?

LIZ. Oh, I read with him at auditions, and she told me afterwards how she liked how we worked together.

DANIEL. Ed McDonald? So she wasn't seriously considering him?

LIZ. For a while. But I told her you were better for the part.

DANIEL. Well, thanks.

Ed would have been better.

LIZ. Not working with me. You and I are better suited for these roles.

DANIEL. So this was after she cast you?

LIZ. Yeah.

DANIEL. When did you get cast?

LIZ. Well, I didn't know for sure until callbacks.

DANIEL. So you were precast?

LIZ. No, no. I had to audition like everyone else.

DANIEL. Liz. Who else was called back? For Beatrice.

LIZ. Oh God, I wish I hadn't said anything. She was leaning towards the wrong man, and I told her she had to cast you. I wanted to work with you.

DANIEL. So the only reason she cast me is because you told her to?

LIZ. I knew you would take it like that.

DANIEL. I don't like being someone's second choice.

LIZ. God, Daniel, I'm your friend, but you act so *deserving* sometimes. Do you know how much more you have worked than me? How many times did I complain to you, when we were starting out, about all the auditions I went to? Where there were two men and 25 women? Do you ever see e-mails saying "urgent, need women"? Yes, I was pre-cast. Someone wanted me, they had a role for me. After all these years, I get called for roles. They don't just tell me how much they want to work with me and wish they had a role for me.

And then there's Jack, no training, huge roles just get offered to him. He can't do Shakespeare worth shit. He does all that stammering and hesitating crap. He doesn't learn his lines, he doesn't learn his fight, he got the part because he's young and cute. I was young and cute! And I watched guys with no talent get cast while I thanked the auditors for seeing me and hoped to see them the next time. And even after all these years, I still feel glad to be offered such big parts. Pardon me if I don't have any sympathy for you.

DANIEL. Too goddamned many.

That still doesn't mean I like to be someone's leftovers.

Who cares about Jack?

I don't expect you to say thank you.  
 I know you well enough to know that you  
 always want to earn your opportunities  
 honestly. But you did earn this honestly.      Yeah, you put in a good word.  
 You're a great actor, I know you better  
 than Melissa does, and I sure would like it      Damn straight.  
 if you would be glad that I'm friends  
 enough with you to advocate for you..

*(Silence. They have arrived at LIZ'S car by this point.)*

DANIEL. I'm being a jerk.

LIZ. Yeah.

DANIEL. I'll do my thing of being pissed off, and then I'll apologize to you.  
 Fast forward?

LIZ. Fast forward.  
 Thanks for walking me to my car.

DANIEL. You're welcome.

LIZ. Let me know if you need a ride tomorrow.

DANIEL. I should be all right.  
 Are we working on the end of act five?

LIZ. Yes.

DANIEL. Is she having us kiss?

LIZ. Yes.

DANIEL. Where?

LIZ. The traditional place. After "Peace I will stop your mouth."

DANIEL. Okay.  
 See you tomorrow.  
 I'm still pissed off. But I'd rather know.

LIZ. I'm sorry you're pissed, but I still don't have any sympathy for you.

DANIEL. You're a hard woman.

LIZ. Damn straight. Don't mess with me.

DANIEL. We've never kissed.

LIZ. There was that one time you kissed my hand.

DANIEL. But never *kissed* kissed.

LIZ. You're right.

Do you need a ride to where Charlotte is picking you up?

DANIEL. No, it's just over there.

LIZ. Could we just do it, and get it over with? The first time. Otherwise I'm going to wig out about it till tomorrow. Seeing as how you're still mad at me and I don't have any sympathy for you.

DANIEL. Um. Okay. Um... *(As Benedick.)* "Come, I will have thee; but, by this light, I take thee for pity."

LIZ. *(As Beatrice.)* "I would not deny you; but, by this good day, I yield upon great persuasion; and partly to save your life, for I was told you were in a consumption."

DANIEL. *(As Benedick.)* "Peace! I will stop your mouth."

*(They kiss.)*

LIZ. *(Quoting Don Pedro.)* "How dost thou, Benedick, the married man?"

DANIEL. *(As Benedick.)* I'll tell thee what Prince: a college of wit-crackers cannot flout me out of my humor..." Etc., etc.

All right.

LIZ. That's over with.

*(DANIEL starts laughing. LIZ joins in before she knows what's funny.)*

LIZ. What?

DANIEL. You're wonderful, Liz. You're the only person I know that I can fight with, and then be totally practical and close with.

LIZ. Wow. You're a piece of shit, Daniel.

DANIEL. I know.

*(Finally their laughter subsides.)*

LIZ. Well, go away, I've got to go home.

DANIEL. Bye. See you tomorrow.

LIZ. See you tomorrow.

Scene 9. Tech rehearsal. Melissa directing, Amber on book. Barry, the lighting designer, is up in the booth (we only hear his voice). The lighting is dim, suggesting a cloudy day, and there is a sound effect of rain.

BARRY. (*Off.*) We can give you this instead.

*(Lighting and sound change: something brighter, and the rain less heavy.)*

MELISSA. (*To AMBER.*) What do you think?

AMBER. If they have that effect tapering off, I like it.

MELISSA. (*Calling to BARRY.*) Do you have that tapering off? Or will you have to fade it out?

BARRY. (*Off.*) I can get it for tomorrow night.

MELISSA. Good. Let's do that. I like it being raining, but not so much.

BARRY. (*Off.*) And here's the transition for when Beatrice enters...

MELISSA. I like it. Let's keep it.

BARRY. (*Off.*) You got it.

AMBER. (*Calling out.*) Okay, everyone. We're moving on to 5, 2. Beatrice? Benedick?

LIZ. (*Off.*) I'm ready.

DANIEL. (*Off.*) Sorry, wardrobe malfunction.

MELISSA. Do you need more time?

DANIEL. (*Off.*) Hang on...

*(DANIEL enters, in costume.)*

MELISSA. We're doing the transition from your monologue to Beatrice's entrance. So pick up at the end of that monologue.

BENEDICK. ... a babbling rhyme: very ominous endings. No, I was not born under a rhyming planet nor I cannot woo in festival terms.

*(BEATRICE enters.)*

BENEDICK. Sweet Beatrice, wouldst thou come when I called thee?

BEATRICE. Yea Signoir, and depart when you bid me.

BENEDICK. O stay but until then.

MELISSA. Actors, hold. Liz, you're not in your light.

LIZ. I know, I don't have room. To be in my light I have to be up –

MELISSA. Hang on. Hey, Barry?

BARRY. *(Off.)* Yeah?

MELISSA. What's up with Beatrice's light there?

BARRY. It's where it's supposed to be.

LIZ. Yeah, but this... I'd have to be standing on it.

AMBER. Liz, I've got you more up left.

LIZ. Okay. But I'm / still not –

MELISSA. We'll fix that later. For now, let's just go on.

AMBER. Everyone, continue.

AMBER. Oh, I know what. She placed it on the wrong spike marks.

*(AMBER goes to the offending set piece and shifts it.)*

MELISSA. Hey, Barry?

BARRY. Yeah?

MELISSA. I know I said this is what I wanted, but can you cool it down a bit?

*(Lighting change.)*

BARRY. How's this?

MELISSA. Um...

BARRY. Or this.

BENEDICK. O stay but until then.

BEATRICE. Then, is spoken: fare you well now, and yet ere I go, let me go with what I came, which is, with knowing what hath passed between you and Claudio.

BENEDICK. Only foul words, and thereupon I will kiss thee.

BEATRICE. Foul words is but foul wind, and foul wind is foul breath, and foul breath is noisome, therefore I will depart unknissed.

BENEDICK. Thou hast frightened the word out of his right sense, so forcible is thy wit, but I must tell thee plainly, Claudio undergoes my challenge, and either I must shortly hear from him, or I will subscribe him a coward, and I pray thee now tell me, for which of my bad parts didst thou first fall in love with me?

*(Another change.)*

AMBER. I like the second one better.

MELISSA. *(To BARRY.)* Can you show me the transition to the next cue?

BARRY. Just a sec.

*(The lights change to something warmer.)*

MELISSA. That's great. Let's keep it.  
Actors, hold. We're going to skip ahead to the scene change. To the tomb scene.

*(DANIEL and LIZ exit the stage area. DANIEL is admiring LIZ'S costume.)*

DANIEL. *(Of LIZ'S costume.)* Wow. Nice.

LIZ. You think so?

DANIEL. That's a good color on you.

LIZ. Thanks.

Yours is nice, too. Soldier like, not too froufrou.

DANIEL. I've got something froufrou for the wedding scene.

LIZ. Please, God, no.

DANIEL. I can't have a fancy costume, too?

LIZ. It's not like Benedick.

DANIEL. Why not? Benedick might clean up well.

LIZ. He might.

*(They exit.)*

BARRY. Meliss?

MELISSA. Yeah?

BEATRICE. For them all together, which maintained so politic a state of evil, that they will not admit any good part to intermingle with them...

*(LIZ and DANIEL run lines until MELISSA'S line "Actors, hold," and stop wherever they are in the dialog at that point.)*

AMBER. *(To MELISSA.)* That one last piece for the tomb isn't ready, but we'll have it for you tomorrow.

MELISSA. Okay.

*(We hear someone tuning a lute or guitar.)*

MELISSA. I thought you told him to tune up during intermission.

AMBER. I did. He says it goes out of tune quickly. I'll have him go out in the hall.

*(AMBER exits.)*

BARRY. Is #32 going on?

MELISSA. No.

BARRY. I think the bulb just burned out. You want to stop?

MELISSA. No, let's take care of it afterwards along with the other stuff.

AMBER. Don Pedro, Claudio, we're going to 5, 3.

DANIEL. *(Calling from off stage, speaking of the actor playing Don Pedro.)* He has a wardrobe malfunction.

AMBER. Who, Jack?

DANIEL. No, apparently Jack's out having a smoke.

MELISSA. Damn it.

*(AMBER gets out her cell phone and calls Jack.)*

AMBER. Voicemail.

BARRY. Are we going on?

MELISSA. Jack's out having a cigarette.

BARRY. God damn it, Melissa.

MELISSA. I know, I know. *(To AMBER.)* Let's take 10.

AMBER. Everyone? Take 10.

*(MELISSA exits in a way that does not bode well for Jack.)*

Scene 10. Liz and Daniel are in a bar, before the final dress rehearsal.

DANIEL. But Charlotte doesn't want to. She travels so much for her work, she likes to stay home for vacations. And she pointed out that with the amount of work I've been getting, it would be hard to get away.

I feel like I should be getting out of here. Be making it big in New York or LA. I never intended to settle here. I thought, after college I'd be gone. Roam around Europe, teach English.

It's not that I don't like it here. I do.

LIZ. But you're feeling restless?

DANIEL. Charlotte wants to repaint. The inside of the house. With the latest colors. Fashionable.

LIZ. You guys just did that five years ago.

DANIEL. Yeah. I don't give a fuck, she can do it if it makes her happy.

Didn't you ever want to go to New York?

LIZ. Sure. Remember? We'd all go out after shows, get drunk, and talk about making it big in New York.

DANIEL. Yeah. God. So many years ago.

My dad died. My real dad.

LIZ. Oh, my God.

DANIEL. Three weeks ago. I just found out on Saturday.

LIZ. Three weeks ago?

DANIEL. Nobody called my mom for two and a half weeks.

I looked on the Web and found his obituary, and a feature article. Some reporter found him interesting to write about.

LIZ. What did it say?

DANIEL. About the business he started, his civic activities, the awards he won. His wife who predeceased him and his two children.

LIZ. Nothing about you and your mom and your brothers?

DANIEL. Nope. Not a god damn thing.

LIZ. Not even "Also survived by three sons from a previous marriage"?

DANIEL. I don't care so much. But my brothers remember him better.

Hard to know what to say, huh?

LIZ. Well... "I'm sorry your dad, who left your family when you were a toddler and your brothers were young and had barely any contact with you for the rest of his life, is dead"? Or, "Who left your mom with three sons the oldest of whom was just seven"?

How's your mom taking it?

DANIEL. It was 50 years ago, but she remembers, and that part of her cares.

LIZ. Some things you don't forget.

DANIEL. Nope.

LIZ. I guess the funeral would have been weeks ago now. But you wouldn't have gone anyway.

DANIEL. My stepdad is my dad to me. Even Derek considers him his real dad, even though he remembers him the best.

LIZ. Well, "I'm sorry" isn't the right thing to say. But if it was, I would say it.

DANIEL. Thanks.

Scene 11. In the lobby of the theater, after the show on opening night. Daniel is introducing Charlotte to Melissa.

DANIEL. Melissa, this is my wife, Charlotte. *(To CHARLOTTE.)* Melissa, our director.

MELISSA. Nice to meet you.

CHARLOTTE. It's nice to meet you.

MELISSA. Thanks so much for coming.

CHARLOTTE. Of course. I always try to come to the opening night of Daniel's shows.

MELISSA. I hope you enjoyed it.

CHARLOTTE. I did. I've seen this play once before, and you found a different twist on it. He said it's a tribute to vets?

MELISSA. Yeah, to show how they can find love again even after all of the horrible things they've been through.

CHARLOTTE. That's very timely. It made me think. And even after all these years, I still enjoy watching Daniel work.

DANIEL. Yeah, all these years.

MELISSA. He's been great to work with. I've loved every minute of it.

DANIEL. Aww shucks.

MELISSA. Really.

DANIEL. I know.

CHARLOTTE. He doesn't often play dark and troubled, so that's a treat.

MELISSA. He does dark and troubled well, doesn't he?

DANIEL. That sounds scary.

*(LIZ enters.)*

CHARLOTTE. *(To MELISSA.)* You must be glad it's opened. You can relax now.

MELISSA. Yeah, my work is pretty much done. The hard part. But I usually come back a few times. See how things are going.

DANIEL. She keeps us in line.

LIZ. Hi, Charlotte. How are you?

CHARLOTTE. I'm fine. And you?

LIZ. I'm fine. Tired. It's been a long week.

CHARLOTTE. It always is, isn't it.

LIZ. I hope you enjoyed the show.

CHARLOTTE. I did. You did great work, as always.

LIZ. Thanks.

MELISSA. I need to go say hello to some people. *(To CHARLOTTE.)* It was nice to meet you.

CHARLOTTE. Nice to meet you, too.

*(MELISSA exits.)*

CHARLOTTE. She seems like a nice young woman.

DANIEL. She's great.

CHARLOTTE. Didn't Richard come?

LIZ. He wasn't here?

CHARLOTTE. I didn't see him.

LIZ. He's probably still at work.

CHARLOTTE. On a Friday night?

LIZ. His team has a deadline. They've been working insane hours.

CHARLOTTE. Daniel says it's rare to set this play in wartime.

LIZ. Strictly speaking, it is set during wartime, but there's very little war in it. Not like Henry V, for example.

DANIEL. Or the Scots play.

CHARLOTTE. The movie is very much a comedy.

LIZ. Oh, yeah. It's exuberant. And the soldiers look impossibly clean.

DANIEL. When you first see them, at the start of the movie.

LIZ. And uninjured.

DANIEL. You know how I'm limping most of the time? Liz wanted to sew up my leg, but Melissa wouldn't let her.

CHARLOTTE. Sorry?

LIZ. *(To DANIEL.)* I thought it was your idea. *(To CHARLOTTE.)* He's limping because he got cut on the leg by a sword during the battle, before the play starts.

DANIEL. It was your idea, you're the bloodthirsty one.

LIZ. Except we show the end of the battle.

DANIEL. So we wanted to have it that the wound broke open again.

LIZ. And I would sew it up again.

CHARLOTTE. That would've been gruesome.

LIZ. Melissa put a lot of gruesome in the play.

CHARLOTTE. Yes, she did.

*(DANIEL is feeling in his pockets.)*

CHARLOTTE. What's the matter?

DANIEL. I can't find my car keys. I must have left them in the dressing room. Will you be all right till I get back?

CHARLOTTE. Of course.

*(DANIEL exits.)*

LIZ. Daniel told me you made partner. Congratulations.

CHARLOTTE. Thank you. Yes, I just found out on Monday.

LIZ. I guess they'll work you harder than ever.

CHARLOTTE. It will be about the same. But I'll have more say in how the firm operates.

I saw this play a few summers ago, in the park. The actors playing Beatrice and Benedick were much younger. Daniel says that's more typical.

LIZ. It is. I saw that production, too. I liked it.

CHARLOTTE. It must have been interesting, working on these roles, given how long you've known each other.

LIZ. After you've worked with someone as much as we have, you get to know how to work with them well.

CHARLOTTE. Well, it's good for him to have someone he knows so well to work with. I've been so busy lately, we haven't seen much of each other.

LIZ. I imagine it's like getting tenure. At a university.

CHARLOTTE. Oh, yes, you went through that with Howard.

And then, after this production is over, you'll go your separate ways. Do different things.

LIZ. Yes. That's what usually happens.

Well, I'm sorry to be unsociable, but I need to get home. It was nice seeing you again.

CHARLOTTE. Nice seeing you. Say hello to Richard for me.

LIZ. I will.

Scene 12. Backstage. Daniel, Amber, and Liz. Liz is reading a review of the show in a weekly newspaper.

LIZ. *(To AMBER.)* He liked your work, at least.

AMBER. It's cool. Fight choreographers don't usually get mentioned.

DANIEL. Even though he thought the battle stuff was, what, "A young director showing off"?

LIZ. Something for your portfolio.

*(To DANIEL.)* He usually likes your work. What's his problem this time?

DANIEL. Constipation. Or his boyfriend left him.

LIZ. He loved you in Hedda Gabler. "Charming without being warm, he effortlessly captures the character's aristocratic bearing and power over those around him."

DANIEL. You remember that?

LIZ. I was sorry I didn't get to see it.

Thank God he gave us a bad review.

AMBER. Excuse me?

LIZ. A good review from him is the kiss of death.

DANIEL. It's true. When he gives a show a bad review, the audience starts coming.

AMBER. Really?

DANIEL. Attitude sells this paper.

LIZ. Who says "long in the tooth" any more? What does that mean, anyway?

AMBER. When you get older, your gums recede and your teeth look longer.  
It has to do with horses.

LIZ. Well. That's flattering.

I've got to check my costumes. Either of you want this?

DANIEL. Sure.

*(LIZ hands DANIEL the paper and exits.)*

AMBER. How's your shoulder?

DANIEL. Fine. I got a massage yesterday.

AMBER. I'll bet that felt good.

DANIEL. Yeah, it did. Excellent.

AMBER. Good. You gotta take care of yourself.

*(MELISSA enters, crosses to AMBER and DANIEL.)*

AMBER. So, what are you doing after this?

DANIEL. Tonight?

AMBER. I meant after this show closes.

DANIEL. I just got offered something.

AMBER. What is it?

*(MELISSA hands DANIEL an envelope.)*

MELISSA. This is for you. And this.

*(She throws her arms around him and gives him a big hug.)*

MELISSA. Thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

DANIEL. Okay.  
What'd I do?

MELISSA. Chris came to the show last night. He liked it.

DANIEL. I thought he left. During the nightmare scene.

*(DANIEL reads the note.)*

MELISSA. He came back in after intermission. And he stayed until the end. I found him outside afterwards, in that little alcove around the – you know – and we stood there for, like, an hour. Talking.

DANIEL. Yeah?

AMBER. *(To DANIEL.)* What's it say?

*(DANIEL lets AMBER read the note over his shoulder.)*

MELISSA. *(Continuing.)* I was freezing my ass off, but it was totally worth it.

*(LIZ enters, standing to one side, doing some stretching.)*

DANIEL. Cool. Awesome. Give him my number, I'll take him out for a beer.

MELISSA. I will. I so totally will. Oh, and, my mom texted me today, he called the VA and he made an appointment for physical therapy.

DANIEL. Hey, it was all you. *(To AMBER.)* And you.

MELISSA. *(To AMBER.)* Yeah, he loved the scene with the two of them, the one where you said, how would he fall in love.

DANIEL. I should tell Liz.

*(DANIEL leaves MELISSA and AMBER and goes to find LIZ.)*

MELISSA. *(To AMBER.)* He said he totally believed it. He liked how they were serious and still battling it out but letting their feelings, you know, come out all dark and everything. And he fell asleep in the car when I was driving him home. He never does that.

AMBER. Congratulations. Your mom must be really happy.

MELISSA. Oh! I gotta go check on their comps. Yeah, they're very happy. My mom and step-dad. Who knows, it might not last, but it's so fucking cool while it does. I love seeing him alive again.

*(MELISSA leaves AMBER and walks towards the exit to the box office, passing LIZ and DANIEL. LIZ has been reading the note.)*

LIZ. You remind him of his sergeant.  
This is incredible.

DANIEL. It makes all the rest of the shit worthwhile.

LIZ. It sure does.

MELISSA. Break legs, guys.

DANIEL. Thanks.

LIZ. Thanks.

MELISSA. Oh, and, my parents are coming tonight. So. Try not to suck, okay?

DANIEL. Oh shit.

LIZ. That's what we were planning to do.

DANIEL. Completely.

MELISSA. Fuck you both.  
God, I love you guys.

*(She gives each of them a quick hug.)*

MELISSA. Okay. I got to go.  
Break legs.

*(MELISSA exits. AMBER approaches DANIEL and LIZ.)*

AMBER. Hey, Daniel. Fight call.

DANIEL. I'll be right there.

Scene 13. The women's dressing room, backstage during a performance. Liz is sitting at the makeup table, and Daniel standing in the doorway. They are running Beatrice and Benedick's lines from V, ii, speaking rapidly. From the monitor we can faintly hear the sounds of V, i.

LIZ. ... which maintained so politic a state of evil, that they will not — would not, admit any good part to intermingle with them: but for which of my good parts did you first fall in love with me?

DANIEL. Suffer.

LIZ. Jesus! (*Goes back.*) But for which of my good parts did you first suffer love for me?

DANIEL. Suffer love! a good epithet, I do suffer love indeed, for I love thee against my will.

LIZ. In spite of your heart I think, alas poor heart, if you spite it for my sake, I will spite it for yours, for I will never love that which my friend hates.

DANIEL. Thou and I are too wise to woo peacefully.

LIZ. Peaceably.

DANIEL. Peaceably. And now tell me, how doth your cousin?

LIZ. Very ill.

DANIEL. And how do you?

LIZ. Very ill too.

DANIEL. Serve God, love me and mend. Here comes one in haste.

LIZ. "Madam, you must come to your uncle, blah, blah, blah... Will you come presently?" (*As Beatrice.*) Will you go hear this news, signior?

DANIEL. I will live in thy heart, die in thy lap, and be buried in thy eyes; and moreover I will go with thee to thy uncle's.

LIZ. Dammit. I can't keep my lines straight tonight.

DANIEL. Want to do it again?

LIZ. I'll just run it in my head.

DANIEL. You okay?

LIZ. Yeah, I'm fine.

DANIEL. Okay.

*(He exits to go to his dressing room. LIZ checks her make-up in the mirror. DANIEL returns.)*

DANIEL. That was one of those "I'm fine"'s where you want to talk about it, wasn't it?

LIZ. What? No. No, no, no.

Although you'll find out sooner or later. Richard's moving out. He told me this morning.

DANIEL. For good?

LIZ. He says he just needs time to think.

DANIEL. Yeah?

LIZ. Yeah. But the more I think about it, the more I know he's not coming back.

DANIEL. That sucks.

LIZ. You can say "I told you so."

DANIEL. I wasn't going to.

LIZ. Good.

Seriously, though. He's not the right man for me.

DANIEL. I shouldn't have told you the day before your wedding.

LIZ. That was tactless.

DANIEL. I'm an asshole. "Though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an ass."

LIZ. At least you've made it to 20 years. How do you do it?

DANIEL. Sensitivity and boyish charm.

LIZ. You know where Don Pedro asks Beatrice if she'll marry him? Why doesn't she say yes? He's a prince, for God's sake! He's rich, he's good-looking, / he's courtly —

DANIEL. Hey, I'm good looking!

LIZ. — he's nice to her — yeah, yeah — you are — but seriously, why doesn't she say yes? I was saying my line back to him, "No, my lord, unless I might have another for working days, your Grace is too costly to wear every day," and suddenly it hit me.

I'm just like Beatrice. I don't know how to pick men.

DANIEL. You're not like Beatrice.

LIZ. I need to divorce Richard, and give up.

DANIEL. Don't give up.

LIZ. Wait for a man to pick me. If anybody does.

DANIEL. Someone will pick you.

LIZ. I'm past 50, I've been married and divorced three times — or will be soon — I've got a daughter I barely see — which is my fault — who would pick me?

DANIEL. Me.

LIZ. That's nice.

DANIEL. I would.

LIZ. You're rich, courtly, good-looking, nice to me.

DANIEL. Not rich.

LIZ. No.

I gotta go to the bathroom. Thanks for running lines.

DANIEL. No problem.

*(LIZ goes into the bathroom. DANIEL starts to leave, then doesn't. Presently we hear the sound of a toilet flushing and water running. LIZ enters from the bathroom, wiping her hands on a paper towel.)*

LIZ. Don't you have an entrance?

DANIEL. I would pick you.

LIZ. Thanks.

DANIEL. I shouldn't say it. I know.

LIZ. Why not? It's sweet.

DANIEL. It's hell. Five years of hell.

LIZ. It hasn't been five years of hell.

DANIEL. Yes it has.

LIZ. Purgatory, maybe.

DANIEL. For me.

LIZ. It was not your fault. You tried to save me from making a stupid mistake.

DANIEL. Didn't you understand?

LIZ. Obviously not. I married him.

DANIEL. *Why* I was telling you not to marry him?

LIZ. Because he wasn't right for me.  
What are we talking about?

DANIEL. Now hear this, clear as a fucking bell. I told you you weren't right for Richard, because I was right for you. I am right for you. And you're right for me.

LIZ. You're serious.

DANIEL. Deadly serious.

LIZ. You're really saying this.

DANIEL. I really am.

LIZ. You have been an actor too long to confuse your character with yourself.

DANIEL. I've been in love with you so long, I know Benedick hasn't got a goddamn thing to do with it.

LIZ. You're not in love with me. You're seeing a woman in pain and think you can soothe her with lies.

DANIEL. I'm seeing a woman I adore, and I know I'm telling you the truth.

LIZ. If you truly adored me, you'd see this is a bad time to tell me. My husband moved out this morning, and this evening you're expecting what?

DANIEL. To give you my heart.

LIZ. If you had a heart, you'd have kept your mouth shut.

DANIEL. I have a heart, and if you'd open your eyes you'd see it.

LIZ. I'm blind? I see what I am.

DANIEL. If *you* had a heart, you'd see who I am.

LIZ. I see that you're an asshole.

DANIEL. And I know you're a liar. Tell me you don't love me.

LIZ. I'll tell you nothing but get the hell out of my dressing room.  
You have an entrance!

DANIEL. Shit.  
We're not through talking about this.

*(He exits.)*

LIZ. Oh, yes, we are!

*(LIZ is motionless. Then she sees DANIEL'S rapier, where he left it when they were running lines. She picks it up just as he re-enters.)*

DANIEL. I need that.

LIZ. Why did you say all that?

DANIEL. I need my fucking rapier.

LIZ. Why?

DANIEL. Please give it to me.

Because I didn't say it five years ago. Hell, I didn't say it 25 years ago. Remember *Midsummer Night's Dream*? You asked me out, and I was fucking what's her name. I still remember the look on your face when you found out. If I hadn't done that you wouldn't have married your first husband.

LIZ. You apologized for that.

DANIEL. *(Continuing.)* I still feel like shit for that.

LIZ. You already apologized —

DANIEL. *(Continuing.)* You said during tech week that my work had improved? I finally got Benedick when I admitted to myself what an asshole I'd been.

LIZ. What about Charlotte? You're married!

DANIEL. I will leave Charlotte, if you will have me. I won't say our marriage is on the rocks, or that she doesn't understand me, or that I don't love her. It isn't, and she does, and in fact I do. But I have never loved anyone as well as I love you.

LIZ. You're a fool. You would throw away 20 years of marriage for someone who can't stay married more than five years at a time? Do you know how much I want what you have?

DANIEL. That's because you've picked the wrong men. But you're not picking me, I'm picking you. I have what you want.  
Could you point that down?

LIZ. I don't love you.

Take it.

Take it. You have an entrance.

Take your goddamned sword!

DANIEL. I do spy some marks of love in her.

LIZ. Get out.

DANIEL. See you on stage.

LIZ. Count on it.

*(DANIEL exits.)*

Scene 14. After the show, backstage.

MELISSA. What you guys found tonight, it was really interesting. In “Sweet Beatrice, wouldst thou come when I called thee?” I like the uncertainty you guys found.

DANIEL. Thanks. Has Liz left?

MELISSA. I don’t think so. You can keep that, I thought it really worked.

DANIEL. Okay. Thanks. I will.

*(DANIEL goes into LIZ’S dressing room, but she’s gone. DANIEL sees AMBER straightening up backstage.)*

AMBER. Hey, Daniel. You guys did really well tonight, especially at the end.

DANIEL. Thanks. / Have you –

AMBER. The kiss especially, the whole last scene, in fact. I wanted to tell Liz the same thing.

DANIEL. You didn’t see her?

AMBER. No. Jack said he thought she left.

*(DANIEL steps away, takes out his cell phone, makes a call. Gets voicemail and hangs up.)*

AMBER. Is something wrong?

DANIEL. No. Nothing’s wrong.

*(DANIEL exits, AMBER watches, returns to tidying up backstage.)*

Scene 15. Off, we can hear the last of the play. There is an undercurrent of anger and hostility that has not been there before.

BENEDICK. A miracle, here's our own hands against our hearts: I will have thee, but by this light I take thee for pity.

BEATRICE. I would not deny you, but by this good day, I yield upon great persuasion, and partly to save your life for I was told, you were in a consumption.

BENEDICK. Peace I will stop your mouth.

*(There is the sound of a resounding slap. Then dead silence, except for some gasps from the audience. Finally:)*

PRINCE. How dost thou Benedick the married man?

*(Silence. Finally we hear the MESSENGER, jumping in:)*

MESSENGER. My lord, your brother John is taken in flight, and brought with armed men back to Messina.

BENEDICK. Think not on him till tomorrow, I'll devise thee brave punishments for him: strike up pipers.

*(Music starts for the actors to take their bows to the audience offstage. DANIEL stalks on, furious. One of his cheeks is red [which one depending on whether the actress playing LIZ is left-handed or right-handed]. We see someone gesture to DANIEL to get him to come on and take his bow. Finally LIZ, enters, furious.)*

LIZ. Get the fuck on stage and take your bow!

DANIEL. What the fuck was that?

LIZ. Get the fuck on stage!

*(AMBER enters.)*

AMBER. Daniel, you have to take your bow.

DANIEL. Fuck you!

*(DANIEL stalks past LIZ, goes onstage, taking his bow, the audience applauding but also afraid. LIZ follows to bow with him, but DANIEL exits [enters], crosses the stage, and exits to his dressing room. LIZ crosses to her dressing room, slams the door, starts ripping off her costume. DANIEL enters, partly out of his costume, goes to her dressing room.)*

DANIEL. Liz!

*(LIZ rips something on her costume.)*

LIZ. God damn it.

DANIEL. Liz!

LIZ. Leave me alone!

*(DANIEL opens the door.)*

DANIEL. What the fuck was that?

LIZ. Get the hell out of my dressing room!

DANIEL. My ear is ringing! I can't hear a fucking thing!

LIZ. Good! You condescending prick!

*(LIZ is down to her underwear now, ordinary bra and panties, perhaps not quite matching.)*

DANIEL. Good? You slapped me on my ear!

LIZ. You have been sneering at me the entire show. You have been mean, not Benedick, you have been mean. You've withheld yourself, you weren't connecting, you acted like I wasn't there, and you expected me to kiss you at the end? Every scene we had together, it was you taking out your anger, your frustration, with your life or whatever, out on me. You have never done me like this! Even at the worst moments of your life, you have always been professional!

DANIEL. You slapped me on my ear

You slapped me on my ear.

You slapped me on my ear.

And you never slapped me on my ear. I can't hear a thing out of this ear. And what the fuck were you doing in "Lady Beatrice have you wept all this while?" You cut my god damned hand!

You wouldn't let me take your rapier!

Look!

You turned away!

It's fucking bleeding!

Why did you put your hand on it!

I didn't put my hand on it.

Right as I was pulling it out!

Yes, it was –

I was already going for it!

All right! All right! It's all my fault. I apologize. Now get the hell out of my dressing room. Get the hell out –

Fuck you.

That's what you were doing?  
You were a fucking bonfire!

And you think Beatrice would fall in love with your Benedick? Not a snowball's chance in fucking hell. You finally got Benedick when you admitted what an asshole you were to me? You surpassed yourself tonight. Get out.

*(Icy cold.)* Get out of my dressing room or I will hurt you seriously. I swear to God.

*(DANIEL leaves her dressing room, storms over to the props table to put his rapier away, then exits to his dressing room. LIZ finishes dressing into her street clothes, wiping makeup off her face. She is calming herself. Presently AMBER approaches.)*

AMBER. Liz?  
Can I come in?

LIZ. Sure.

AMBER. How are you doing?

LIZ. I shouldn't have slapped him. And I should have been more careful getting his rapier away from him. I'm sorry. I was unprofessional tonight. And I'll apologize to him whenever he's ready.

AMBER. He was sneering at you tonight. And I could see from the booth that he wasn't letting you get his rapier.

But, you know, this can't happen again.

My hand was nowhere near it! You shouldn't have gone for it when I was turning away!

You could have seriously hurt me!

Another thing. Where the hell was your energy tonight? You weren't Beatrice! You were some pale, weak, no fire, no intelligence, I was trying to give you something to work with, anything to raise a spark in you. You kept looking at me for permission to do your work, your Beatrice wasn't one Benedick would fall in love with in a million years!

You abandoned me out there. Just like you abandon me over and over, the whole time I've known you.

LIZ. I know. I'm sorry.

I have never done anything like that before. Not ever.

AMBER. What's going on?

LIZ. Ask him.

AMBER. You guys have a thing for each other, don't you?

LIZ. Oh, God. A thing.

I don't know what we have.

AMBER. Everyone else does.

LIZ. He told you?

AMBER. He didn't have to. We can all tell.

LIZ. Oh, Jesus.

AMBER. Okay, maybe this is none of my business, but did you guys sleep together?

LIZ. No!

AMBER. Oh.

*(LIZ gestures towards the door.)*

LIZ. Could you...

*(AMBER gets up and closes the door.)*

LIZ. He told me he loves me. During the show Sunday. He'll leave Charlotte for me. That he's the one for me.

AMBER. Good for him.

LIZ. What?

AMBER. He is the one for you. I mean, you guys are right for each other.

LIZ. He's married.

AMBER. So? People get divorced all the time.

I'm not saying it's a good thing. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying just do it. But, hell, my mom divorced my dad. She knew he wasn't the right man, my sister was five and I was two, she divorced him and went on welfare and finished college. And she got a job and then she married my stepdad. Kids are supposed to do better if their parents stay together, I heard that, but we did just fine. Our life is so much better with our stepdad. My real dad's a loser.

LIZ. You've got remarkable perspective.

AMBER. I think it's just a generational thing. If you don't mind my saying so. I think, like, people of my mom's generation, well of your generation I guess, they think marriage ought to be forever. And they beat themselves up if they're not. Together forever. I think my generation, we just think more practically. Sometimes marriages just aren't meant to be.

LIZ. You are a dear.

AMBER. Well, that's what I think, anyhow.

LIZ. I really have never done anything like that before.

AMBER. I know. I believe you.  
Let me go find him.

LIZ. I can't talk to him yet.

AMBER. No, no, I'll talk to him.

LIZ. Thanks.

AMBER. Hug?

*(They hug.)*

LIZ. Thank you.

AMBER. If you want to leave now, you guys can talk before the show tomorrow.

LIZ. Thanks, but I should apologize to him tonight. If he wants to hear it.  
God. We have never had a fight like that.

AMBER. We'll figure it out.

*(AMBER leaves LIZ'S dressing room. She crosses to the entrance to DANIEL'S dressing room, and offstage we hear her knocking.)*

AMBER. Hey, Daniel?

DANIEL. Yeah, come in.

AMBER. How you doing?

DANIEL. I can't hear out of my ear. It's ringing. If I lose hearing out of this ear, I won't work with her again.

AMBER. You have to.  
Liz would like to apologize to you. When you're ready.

DANIEL. Yeah.

AMBER. I'll go get her.

*(AMBER comes over to LIZ'S dressing room.)*

AMBER. Liz? Daniel would like to talk to you now.

*(LIZ stands, walks out of her dressing room, DANIEL exits out of his dressing room, pulling on a T-shirt. They walk towards each other.)*

LIZ. I apologize. I shouldn't have slapped you. I'm sorry about your ear.

DANIEL. Yeah. It's still ringing.

LIZ. And I'm sorry for cutting you with the rapier.

*(LIZ waits, but DANIEL turns and walks back to his dressing room. LIZ exits to go onstage, comes back with the mask she wears at the end of the play, puts on the props table. LIZ goes to her dressing room, hangs up her costume, and goes to the bulletin board and makes a note on the costumer's sheet. DANIEL enters to do the same. LIZ looks at him steadily but says nothing, goes back to her dressing room. After DANIEL writes his note, he goes to her dressing room, but she has finished gathering her things, and walks past him and exits.)*

Scene 16. Liz and Daniel lying in Liz's bed. They have just made love; they are lying in the afterglow.

DANIEL. So it's true what they say about fighting.

LIZ. Yeah.

God, when I called you, I really meant we should talk!

DANIEL. Yeah, right.

LIZ. I did!

DANIEL. Yeah, right.

LIZ. Man, I was nervous.

DANIEL. About what?

LIZ. Having sex with you. We've known each other so long.  
Weren't you nervous?

DANIEL. Yeah. Some. It's different, making love to a friend. To someone you love already.

LIZ. Yeah, it is. It's sweeter. More fond.

DANIEL. I'm sorry about when I was going down on you.

LIZ. Oh. Don't worry about it. It's fine.

DANIEL. I'll make it up to you.

LIZ. I'll take you on a tour later.

*(They snuggle. After a bit:)*

DANIEL. Excuse me.

LIZ. What's the matter?

*(DANIEL exits to the bathroom. From the bathroom, we hear a loud fart that he has obviously tried to muffle without succeeding. LIZ bursts into laughter. DANIEL enters.)*

DANIEL. What's so funny?

LIZ. God, that was loud! So unromantic.

DANIEL. I needed to do it.

LIZ. Apparently.

DANIEL. It was that burrito I had for lunch.

LIZ. Thank God you didn't do it during the show.

*(DANIEL joins LIZ in bed.)*

DANIEL. I should have let loose a big one after "What my dear Lady Disdain, are you yet living?"

LIZ. Only way Benedict would have won that argument.

*(They snuggle. After a bit, DANIEL starts looking closely at LIZ'S hair.)*

DANIEL. When did you start going gray? I ought to know but I can't remember.

LIZ. I knew for sure when I was 40, but I think I really saw my first gray hairs when I was 35. The girl who cuts my hair kept saying I didn't have gray hair, but I think she was just being nice.

DANIEL. Probably thought you wouldn't tip her.

LIZ. Probably. How about you? I think you were going gray when we met.

DANIEL. Yeah, I started going gray early. My brothers did, too.

LIZ. What's this?

DANIEL. What?

LIZ. These bumps.

DANIEL. I hit my head on the fireplace. I must have been five or six. One of my brothers was chasing me.

LIZ. Did it bleed a lot?

DANIEL. Oh, yeah. Scared my mom to death.

LIZ. Cynthia fell and hit her head when she was three. Scared me to death. And I never could get the carpet clean.

Did you have to have stitches?

DANIEL. Oh, yeah. I showed them off to all the other kids at school.

Excuse me.

*(DANIEL goes back into the bathroom.)*

LIZ. Another one?

*(Another loud fart. DANIEL returns.)*

DANIEL. I think that's it.  
Stop laughing.

LIZ. I can't help it.

DANIEL. Like you never fart.

*(DANIEL gets back in bed, laughing with her. He looks at her.)*

LIZ. What?

DANIEL. You're beautiful.

LIZ. Oh, Daniel.

DANIEL. You are.

LIZ. I'm 53. I have gray hair, I've had a baby and I have stretch marks, my breasts aren't perky anymore.

DANIEL. I'm 52. You're still beautiful.

LIZ. Well, you are, too.

DANIEL. I don't know. I go to all these auditions, and I'm up against all these young Turks with energy and good knees, and I'm going gray and losing my hair.

LIZ. Those young Turks are idiots. They're not as good actors as you are, they never will be.

I like your chest hair especially. Sometimes the tie at the top of your shirt front – you know, your costume – it comes untied, and your chest hair peeks out. I think that's sexy.

Don't get all squirmy. It is.

DANIEL. You said you never thought of me that way.

LIZ. I hadn't.

DANIEL. You think I have sexy chest hair but you never thought of me that way?

LIZ. I didn't! Except, it's funny, I remember being really happy that you had been cast. Looking forward to working with you in this show.

*(She has puzzled herself.)* I don't know what that's got to do with anything.

DANIEL. You were like a teenager. Wanting to play a romantic character with me.

LIZ. How embarrassing. I thought I grew out of that years ago.

DANIEL. What's this?

LIZ. Nothing. Just some minor surgery.  
I had a lump removed.

DANIEL. Was it serious?

LIZ. It's okay.

DANIEL. Tell me. Please.

LIZ. They got it all. It's fine.  
Yes, it was malignant, but it was fine.

DANIEL. When was this?

LIZ. Two and a half years ago.

DANIEL. Why didn't you say something?

LIZ. We're friends, but it's still not the kind of thing I tell most people.

DANIEL. Do you see your doctor regularly?

LIZ. Of course.

DANIEL. And get mammograms?

LIZ. Yes. Every six months.

DANIEL. Do they think you'll get another one?

LIZ. Daniel. I'm all right. Really I am. I do self exams every month, I see my doctor, I get mammograms.

DANIEL. I don't want to lose you now that I've got you.

LIZ. Well, if it comes to that, do you get prostate exams regularly?

DANIEL. Yes.

LIZ. Do you?

DANIEL. Yes. It's not something a guy likes to talk about.

LIZ. What about mammograms? Women don't like to talk about them. Except to complain to other women about how painful they are.

DANIEL. Prostate exams are painful.

LIZ. They are more uncomfortable than painful.

DANIEL. You have no way of knowing that.

LIZ. Getting your breasts squeezed between two metal plates? Two cold, hard metal plates?

It doesn't matter how big or small you are, it still hurts. Especially twice a year.

And if they want to see a particular spot, they have this little attachment that squeezes one part of your tit really hard. And you have to stand there for an *hour* until they're ready –

Euw.

I give!  
Stop that. Stop!  
Yuck. Yuck yuck yuck.

DANIEL. Do I win? Do I?

LIZ. Yes! Yes! You win. God.  
The doctor does not really get shit on the glove.

DANIEL. No, I was making that up.

LIZ. You're such an asshole.

DANIEL. You said that to me the other day, too.

LIZ. Well, you are.

DANIEL. You started it.

LIZ. Yeah, yeah.

*(They kiss.)*

LIZ. God, you're a good kisser. Have you always been this good?

DANIEL. Oh, baby. Fireworks.

LIZ. I wish we could stay like this forever.

DANIEL. At least you don't have someone's finger up your asshole.

Try bending over and having the doctor stick a finger up your butt from behind.

And he presses really hard, and feels all around.

And sometimes, when he takes out his finger, there's little bits of shit sticking to the glove, and it stinks, and he can tell what you've been eating, and it's really embarrassing, cause he says, huh, not enough roughage...

DANIEL. So do I.

LIZ. Like kids, just the two of us, the rest of the world doesn't exist.

DANIEL. Here forever.

I do have to go home at some point.

LIZ. But not yet, right?

DANIEL. Not yet.

LIZ. Want to order pizza?

DANIEL. Guys are supposed to be the ones who get hungry after sex.

LIZ. I know. What time is it?

God, it's later than I thought.

DANIEL. What?

Some place will still be open.

LIZ. It's not that.

I'm thinking about you going home to Charlotte.

DANIEL. Don't think about it.

LIZ. Are you thinking about it?

DANIEL. No. / Don't worry about –

LIZ. You are. You are thinking about it.

DANIEL. We both know I have to go home sooner or later.

LIZ. I know.

What we going to do?

DANIEL. Not think about it. Lie here each other's arms.

LIZ. What does this mean?

DANIEL. What?

LIZ. Us. Sleeping together.

DANIEL. It means we finally did what we should have done 25 years ago.

LIZ. But we've done it *now*.

DANIEL. Are you sorry?

LIZ. No.

DANIEL. I'm not either.

*(DANIEL kisses her, but she pulls away.)*

DANIEL. What?

LIZ. I just slept with a man whose wife I've known for over 20 years.

DANIEL. I was here, too.

LIZ. And I even know what it's like. What's going to happen now? Is Richard going to divorce me because of this? Is Charlotte going to kick you out?

DANIEL. Richard's already left you.

LIZ. But / is Charlotte going to –

DANIEL. And he already cheated on you.

LIZ. *(Continuing.)* – kick you out? Because you've never cheated on her before. No, I can tell.

DANIEL. You've never cheated on your husbands, have you?

LIZ. No. Though God knows I had cause.

DANIEL. See? First time for both of us.

Sorry. That wasn't funny.

LIZ. You said you would leave her for me, and I believe you, but what if you can't? You've been married for 20 years, and you just cheated on her. Your sense of honor will keep you there, if nothing else.

DANIEL. What if you can't let go of Richard? You couldn't let go of your first two husbands.

LIZ. That's not fair.

DANIEL. It was agony, watching you.

LIZ. What are we going to do?

DANIEL. If I hadn't slept with... Devon! Who played Hermia. *We* would have been married 20 years.

LIZ. Maybe. I wasn't ready to be married 20 years.

DANIEL. Do I really have a sense of honor?

LIZ. Jesus, Daniel.

DANIEL. Why do we have to be middle-aged and know so much about love?

LIZ. It's terrible.

DANIEL. If we were young, we wouldn't think about all this shit. We'd have just hopped into bed without worrying about it. No angst.

LIZ. Different kind of angst. All that young worrying, is it going to turn out all right, does he really love me? Is he The One?

DANIEL. You've really loved all of your husbands, haven't you?

LIZ. Yes. That's not my problem. It's picking men I can't stay with.  
Why do you want to pick me? I have so much baggage.

DANIEL. I have baggage, too.  
Our baggage matches.

LIZ. We have matching baggage?

DANIEL. Yes.

LIZ. We do, don't we?

DANIEL. I want this so much to work.

LIZ. So do I.

DANIEL. I don't know how.

LIZ. I don't either.  
I can only see a few steps ahead. To tell Richard I want a divorce.

DANIEL. Do you?

LIZ. I want to stop doing the same damn thing I've done over and over.  
The next step, I don't know.  
What's your next step?

DANIEL. To see if I can leave Charlotte.  
I've taken the first step. I couldn't cheat on her before.  
That doesn't sound right.  
I couldn't think of leaving her, of marrying someone else. Before.  
All I can promise is I'll try. To take the next step.

LIZ. So will I. I promise.

Scene 17. The living room of Daniel's house.

CHARLOTTE. No, I'm glad.

DANIEL. What?

CHARLOTTE. I think it's about time. You've been watching her like a lost dog for years.

DANIEL. I have?

CHARLOTTE. Maybe now you'll get her out of your system. Oh, yes. Since she married Richard. At least since then.

DANIEL. I didn't know.

CHARLOTTE. Of course you did.

DANIEL. I mean... Why didn't you say something?

CHARLOTTE. What would I have said? "Go ahead and sleep with her, get her out of your system?"

DANIEL. What are we going to do?

CHARLOTTE. Why do we need to do anything? You did it, it's over, we move on.  
If you need to talk more about this, we can, but right now I have to go to bed. I have to be up at 6:00.

DANIEL. I assume you want me to stop seeing her.

CHARLOTTE. What do you mean, "stop"? You said it was just the one time.

DANIEL. Working with her. Being her friend.

CHARLOTTE. I want you to do whatever you need to do to disentangle yourself from her.

DANIEL. Disentangle?

CHARLOTTE. Of course. I've put up with your emotional absence for five years now. I think you would have to concede that that's long enough.

DANIEL. I have not been emotionally absent.

CHARLOTTE. Danny, your attention has been on your acting, on her, on anything besides me. We barely see each other. And when was the last time we had sex?

DANIEL. You've been busy. You were trying to make partner.

CHARLOTTE. You could have supported me better.

DANIEL. I was supporting you. You had to work over the weekend, so I did the housework and didn't complain. You had to work late so we couldn't get dinner before rehearsal, I understood. You were too tired to have sex, I just cuddled, or else stayed on my damn side of the bed so you could get some sleep.

CHARLOTTE. The presence of support is not the absence of bothering me.

DANIEL. What the hell does that mean?

CHARLOTTE. Support is more than just staying out of someone's way.

DANIEL. I know that! I would try to talk to you, but you'd rather talk to your attorney friends. / I offered to coach you on making your opening statements, but –

CHARLOTTE. I had to network. I was trying to make partner, I thought that's what you wanted! I don't want to argue about this. It's late, and I have a big settlement conference in the morning. I have to get some sleep.

DANIEL. You always do this. You're too busy to talk.

CHARLOTTE. And you always bring things up at the worst possible time.

*(CHARLOTTE exits. DANIEL stands, thoughts churning. Then CHARLOTTE returns.)*

CHARLOTTE. Look. Maybe I didn't accept your support. If that's the case, I apologize. But if we want to clear this up, it has to be at a time when we're both rested and clearheaded. Especially something as serious as this. I simply can't cancel anything tomorrow. But I'll get a good night's sleep tomorrow night, I'll reschedule some things so I can get home early, and we'll talk.

DANIEL. That sounds sensible.

CHARLOTTE. I am sensible. That's why you married me. Remember?

DANIEL. One of the reasons.  
You married me because I was flighty.

CHARLOTTE. Not flighty. Mercurial.

DANIEL. That's right. I thought you meant, "like Mercutio."  
That was a long time ago.

CHARLOTTE. We'll fix this.

DANIEL. Char. I don't know how to get her out of my system.

CHARLOTTE. You'll have to.

DANIEL. I love her.

I'm in love with her.

CHARLOTTE. Oh, for God's sake.

I'm checking into a hotel. I have got to get some sleep.

I'm a fool. I've been pretending that nothing's wrong with this marriage for five years. I should have given up. Remember the Christmas party? The man you said was such good friends with me? He wanted to be more than friends. He still does. So do I. But I stayed loyal to our marriage. And what do I get after five years? You sleep with her! You're in love with her! You left this marriage long ago. No regard for me, no energy into us, no care for our marriage. So many times I've come home to an empty house.

I'm leaving. I'm packing a bag and I'm leaving.

Scene 18. Liz and Daniel, outside the theater, before the last performance.

LIZ. I saw a lawyer Friday. For the first time in my life, I am initiating divorce proceedings.

DANIEL. How do you feel?

LIZ. I expected to feel ashamed, but I don't. I feel alive.

DANIEL. Good for you. You took your first step.

LIZ. Yes, I did.

I wish, now, that I hadn't hung on so long. Every time, the more distant my husband got, the harder I'd try. And the worse I'd make things.

DANIEL. Don't beat yourself up about it.

LIZ. (*Wryly.*) But that's what I do best.

Anyhow, my lawyer is drawing up the papers.

DANIEL. Good. And I'd say that in any case.

LIZ. When I called Richard to tell him, he actually sounded surprised. Or disappointed. Like he was disappointed that I'd taken the decision away from him.

Have you thought about what your next step is?

DANIEL. When Amber asked if Charlotte was going to see the show again, and I said she was on a business trip? She checked into a hotel.

I told her about us.

I'm sorry.

It was a stupid thing to do. But you know what? It didn't matter. I thought she'd be devastated, and she was, but that didn't ruin our marriage. Apparently I've already ruined it. So she left. Packed a bag and left.

And she's right. I don't love her. Not the way husband should.

LIZ. That sounds awfully convenient.

DANIEL. It's true. I've always known it. Come on, you've always known, underneath it all, what you were doing with your husbands.

LIZ. You mean here? In town?  
Why?

You told her?

Damn it, Daniel, we agreed we wouldn't say anything yet!

What do you –

LIZ. Yes, I did.

You remember when I said I didn't want to be a homewrecker? I don't want to be one now. But – God help me – I'm glad. If Charlotte is leaving you. That's a horrible thing to say.

DANIEL. No, no.

LIZ. I was going to ask you to leave Charlotte for me, but I didn't want to. In case I'm on the rebound.

Maybe we should wait, make sure I still feel this way in a year.

DANIEL. A year?

LIZ. Or six months. Or something. I have fallen into my marriages with my husbands, and I absolutely will not do that with you.

DANIEL. I see.

No, that makes sense.

LIZ. I'm sorry. You look like a kid who's just given someone the best present he could possibly give, and she says she doesn't want it.

DANIEL. I love you, Liz. I want to be with you. For the rest of my life.

You and I have what it takes. We can fight, can't we? And make up?

LIZ. God knows we've done it enough in this show.

DANIEL. We know we like each other.

LIZ. We've already gone through ups and downs.

DANIEL. See?

LIZ. You're right.

DANIEL. I know better than to keep trying with something that's not working. I've seen you do it enough.

LIZ. Gee, thanks.

DANIEL. I am sorry. For sleeping with what's her name.

LIZ. That was 25 years ago!

Why did you do it?

DANIEL. I'd like to say because I knew you were the one, but I was just an asshole.

LIZ. I don't think I realized how hurt I was at the time.

You wouldn't even sleep with me, you jerk!

DANIEL. You were worth the wait.

LIZ. So were you.

DANIEL. I love you, Liz.

LIZ. I love you, Daniel.  
Well, last show.

DANIEL. Last show.

LIZ. Let's make it good.

*(They kiss.)*

*The End*