

Scene Two

*It is several hours later. JANICE is in the kitchen making coffee. BARB comes out of the bathroom drying her hands. They spot each other, and there is an instant note of tension. BARB backtracks into the bathroom. There is silence for a moment.*

JANICE:

You might as well come out of the bathroom. There's only so much you can do in there. I've made some coffee. Would you like some?

*There is a pause before BARB comes out.*

BARB:

Thank you.

JANICE:

How long do you think Rodney and Tonto – I can't believe I'm calling him that – will be?

*BARB shrugs, unwilling to talk.*

JANICE:

Is the bedroom fine?

*BARB nods.*

JANICE:

You're a little old to be giving me the silent treatment.

BARB:

Milk, please.

JANICE:

That's a beginning.

BARB:

You wanna talk, okay then, I have a question for you. Why are you being so nice all of a sudden?

JANICE:

Fair enough. I suppose from your perspective I do deserve a bit of a cold shoulder. I wasn't exactly the warmest of hosts earlier. But you have to admit, it's a little unusual for the three of you to be waiting in my apartment. I just about had a heart attack.

BARB:

Back in Otter Lake, if somebody's not home, we wait inside.

JANICE:

This isn't Otter Lake. But I guess you had a valid reason for coming here. I understand that.

BARB:

How nice of you.

JANICE:

And I don't see any point for animosity between us. We are, as you keep pointing out, sisters of one nature or another. I'm not a bad person, Barb.

*Again there is an awkward silence between them.*

JANICE:

Do you come to Toronto often?

BARB:

Last time was Christmas.

JANICE:

It's quite the difference, isn't it?

BARB:

As Rodney says, "It's a nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to put a land claim on it."

JANICE:

He's got a very interesting sense of humour.

BARB:

He's a goof. But he's my goof. This is good coffee.

JANICE:

It's a Kenyan blend. Would you like some more?

BARB:

Yeah, that company makes good coffee I hear. I need a good jolt. Long car trips put me away.

JANICE:

It's decaffeinated.

BARB:

Decaffeinated?! Then what's the point? Got any real stuff.

JANICE:

You'd drink caffeinated coffee at this hour of the night?

BARB:

Yeah?

JANICE:

I'd be up all night. Not that it matters. I don't have any, what you might call "real stuff" in the apartment. Better warn you, no salt or butter either.

BARB:

Boy, we'll be outta here real early tomorrow. The more I talk to you, the more I realize there's nothing to talk about.

JANICE:

The subject of coffee is hardly the thing to base a relationship on.

BARB:

Sometimes it's all you got. Mom always wondered what kind of place you lived in. I always thought it would look something like this. Certainly better than our old house.

JANICE:

But that old house had character. This is just a condo.

BARB:

I know a lot of people who would trade some character for a condo like this. Nice art. Even some Native ones, I see. Tonto was impressed.

JANICE:

They were gifts.

BARB:

(*to herself*) Figures.

*There is an awkward silence between the two.*

JANICE:

So when do you think the boys will be back?

BARB:

In a little while, I guess. Tonto wanted to see if there was a social tonight at the Native Centre. He's into things like that.

JANICE:

That's on Spadina, right? Driven by it many times.

BARB:

Did you ever go in?

JANICE:

Never had the time. I notice I've picked up your habit of calling them boys. They must be on both sides of thirty.

BARB:

Yeah, but a boy is always a boy, even in the nursing home. I suspect Rodney will still be climbing trees in his wheelchair. Tonto won't be far behind him.

JANICE:

What a bizarre name. Tonto.

BARB:

Goes with his character.

JANICE:

What does he do?

BARB:

Anything and everything. Basically he survives off of various employment programs, apprenticeships, training incentives, stuff like that. He also drums a bit.

JANICE:

Oh, he's a musician. I used to date this jazz guitarist for a while. He ...

BARB:

He's not exactly a musician. He sings traditional Ojibway songs.

JANICE:

Really? That must be interesting. He can make a living off of that?

BARB:

I think you're missing the point, dear sister.

JANICE:

(*occupied*) Sorry, didn't catch that.

BARB:

I was just thanking you again for taking us out to dinner. That was very nice of you ...

JANICE:

... for a change. Is that what you were thinking?

BARB:

Maybe.

JANICE:

That always seems to be it, doesn't it? Always this ... what would you call it ... tension between us. All through dinner you barely said a word. It doesn't have to be this way, Barb. We could be friends.

BARB:

You're the one who doesn't want to say goodbye to our mother. I'm sorry if that makes me a little sensitive. We shouldn't have come here. With all due respect, Miss Wirth, maybe we shouldn't stay here.

JANICE:

Little late for that, you're here now. Contrary to what you may believe, I have nothing against you or Otter Lake.

BARB:

You'd never know. You haven't even asked how the funeral went.

JANICE:

Fine, Barb, how did the funeral go?

BARB:

Fine as far as funerals go. Everyone was there, even the people she didn't get along with. Flowers everywhere, people. It was the first time I'd seen some of my uncles in suits since Dad died. Nothing quite like seeing a group of overweight middle-aged men in mismatching, twenty-year-old suits all standing in a row.

JANICE:

Was it a traditional funeral?

BARB:

Yeah, Catholic.

JANICE:

I was raised Anglican.

*There is another silence between them.*

JANICE:

There's that awkwardness again.

BARB:

So much for the saying: blood is thicker than water. *(pause)*  
Nice view. Bet it cost a fortune.

JANICE:

What doesn't these days?

BARB:

True.

JANICE:

Your house has a nice view. I remember that beautiful willow tree hanging over the lake. The view from your kitchen window was quite special.

BARB:

You saw it in December. Now there are leaves on the willow and the lake has thawed. Looks even better. Except for the cottages.

JANICE:

What cottages?

BARB:

The band office has leased out land all along the southern shore of the village to cottagers from the city. They're everywhere, like a bad cold.

JANICE:

That's a little harsh.

BARB:

Sorry if I offended you. I didn't think you'd take it personally.

JANICE:

I didn't, and we were talking about the house. Anne's house. Are you going to keep it, now that Anne has ...

JANICE *doesn't know how to finish the sentence.*

BARB:

I don't know. It all hasn't sunk in yet. The house is a mess right now. Mom hired the boys to renovate the place with the money she won in that lottery. Add an extension, a sewing room, just off her bedroom. I don't know what I'll do with it when it's finished. I don't sew much. I don't even know what I'll do with Mom's room.

JANICE:

How are you holding up?

BARB:

I don't have a choice.

JANICE:

Everybody has a choice.

BARB:

Not me. When Dad died, I held the family together. When Paul died, I held the family together. I'm used to this now. I never had the luxury of being able to run away.

JANICE:

Most people would consider seeing their family for the first time in thirty-five years an emotional experience.

BARB:

Most people would have stayed for dinner. Most people would have called in six months. She loved you, you know. She did, even after you walked out on her on goddamned Christmas Eve. She still loved you. Thirty-five years of waiting and she was willing to wait some more.

JANICE:

I explained ...

BARB:

Even when she cried, she still loved you. I knew you wouldn't be back, but I couldn't tell her that. Her whole life had been built on hope, even after you left she still hoped. And as her daughter, I had to help keep that hope alive.

JANICE:

Barb, please ...

BARB:

Last March when she sent you a birthday card, your polite little thank-you card said it all to her.

JANICE:

I was leaving on a business trip. I didn't have time ...

BARB:

Neither did Mom. It was on her night table the morning I found her. You were always beside her. Always.

JANICE:

I had no control over that.

BARB:

Neither did I. I guess it's all Mom's fault then.

JANICE:

That's not fair.

BARB:

Surprise, surprise. I'm the one who failed classes in high school, who got drunk, rolled the car, who made her cry. But you were never there to disappoint her. You were the ideal; I was the reality.

JANICE:

I don't need this.

BARB:

Gonna run away again? Where this time? We're in your place. Or maybe your other family, your white family in London.

JANICE:

Leave them out of this. They have nothing to do with this.

BARB:

Nothing? Are we having the same conversation?! The government took you away from Mom and gave you to them. Did they ever once try to find your home, take you somewhere where there were Indians? Have you ever been to a powwow?

*No answer.*

BARB:

Just once I'd like to know what's going on in that beautified head of yours. You've always got those walls around you. Me and Mom spilled our guts to you but not the immaculate Grace.

JANICE:

I told you about my life, how I found you.

BARB:

You told us the facts. I don't know one damn thing about you, the person.

JANICE:

Oh, you're being ridiculous. Barb, this is my home. You're welcome to stay here, spend the night, whatever, but I hope you'll do me the courtesy of respecting me in my own home.

BARB:

Like you said, it's your home. I wonder where those boys are?

JANICE:

Look behind you, in the corner.

*JANICE points to a picture hanging by itself. BARB walks over to it and examines it.*

JANICE:

I kept it. That picture means everything to me, even though I never knew him.

BARB:

Paul's picture. God, I can't get over how much you look like him.

JANICE:

Yes, I've been told that. I have two other brothers, but it's not the same. They were born to the Wirths. I know we don't see eye to eye, but I do acknowledge who you are and where you came from. I really wish you would do the same for me.

*Suddenly the buzzer for the front door sounds. JANICE goes to answer.*

JANICE:

That must be them. Hello.

RODNEY:

*(voice over the intercom) Aye, Captain, two to beam up. Energize.*

*JANICE buzzes them in.*

JANICE:

Does he ever give up?

BARB:

Don't worry, tomorrow we'll be out of your life.

JANICE:

I wish we could be friends.

BARB:

I wish we could be sisters.

JANICE:

Friends are easier.

BARB:

Sisters are blood.

*There is a knock at the door. JANICE opens it and the boys come in.*

RODNEY:

*(à la Ricky Ricardo)* Lucy, we're home. Boy, was it rough at the club tonight! Where're my bongos?

TONTO:

Is that coffee I smell? I knew there was something about this woman I liked.

BARB:

So did you make it to the Native Centre?

RODNEY:

Yeah, but judging by some of the people we met, they're more off-centre.

TONTO:

*(fake laugh)* Nobody was there, so we took a look around downtown.

BARB:

You weren't hanging around in lingerie shops, again, were you?

RODNEY:

He wouldn't let me. But, Barb, look what we found.

*RODNEY holds up a hardcover book.*

BARB:

Not another one of your books. We got enough as it is.

RODNEY:

No, you'll like this one. It's the latest biography of Amelia Earhart.

BARB:

Really, let's see.

*RODNEY hands it to BARB who looks it over excitedly.*

TONTO:

We haven't had time to read it yet, but they're always good for a hoot.

BARB:

Oh, cool, I love that picture. She looks so young.

TONTO:

I can't wait to show her.

JANICE:

Show who what?

BARB:

This one has her dying in Saipan, a prisoner of the Japanese, in 1937.

TONTO:

Give me a break, white people will find a conspiracy anywhere. Wait a minute, turn back. There's the plane. Ugly thing, eh?

RODNEY:

She never liked flying the Lockheed Electra 10-E - too clumsy.

JANICE:

Who are you talking about?

TONTO:

Amelia Earhart. Who'd you think? This coffee tastes funny.

BARB: It's decaffeinated.

TONTO: Yuck. The savages. How could they do that to an innocent little bean?

RODNEY: Geez, when you think about it, another half an hour and she'd have made Howland Island.

JANICE: Amelia Earhart, the pilot?

RODNEY: You know another? My favourite theory of theirs is she was captured by aliens and forced to breed with Elvis and Jim Morrison to create televangelists. That would explain a lot, wouldn't it?

JANICE: But how come you know so much about her?

RODNEY: It's common knowledge back home.

JANICE: What, her fan club is located in Otter Lake?

BARB: Not quite. Remember the brown brick house about two hundred feet from our place?

JANICE: Yeah, I remember. I almost turned into that driveway by mistake.

BARB: That's where she lives. Just saw her yesterday at the funeral. (to TONTO) Maybe we should buy some regular coffee.

TONTO: Definitely.

BARB: There's no salt or real butter either. If she tells me she's a vegetarian, too ...

JANICE: What is this? Some kind of joke?

BARB: What joke?

JANICE: Amelia Earhart! In Otter Lake.

BARB: Oh, that. Yeah, she and Mom used to be good friends. Used to babysit me and Paul when we were young.

RODNEY: Me, too. Christ, she could swear better than any of us.

JANICE: Amelia Earhart is dead.

BARB: She's in her nineties, but I wouldn't call her dead.

JANICE: You're all not serious, are you? Amelia Earhart? *The* Amelia Earhart?!

RODNEY: Except now she goes by the name Amy Hart. The cutest little, wrinkly white woman you ever saw. Looks like one of those dried-up apple dolls.

BARB: It is Amelia Earhart, Grace.



JANICE:  
Janice!

BARB:  
Okay, Janice.

JANICE:  
Amelia Earhart's been missing for over fifty years.

TONTO:  
Fifty-five, isn't it?

RODNEY:  
Did the big bellyflop July 2, 1937. Had her first bowl of corn soup in Otter Lake November 21, 1937.

BARB:  
It's true.

JANICE:  
If this is all true, then this is fantastic! Incredible. How'd she get there?

TONTO:  
That's another long story. You see ...

JANICE:  
And everybody in the village knows this? I mean about Amelia Earhart?

RODNEY:  
Yeah, it's not as if it's a secret. Almost every kid from the reserve has done some essay or project on her in school. After a while the teachers were getting suspicious, so we had to make up a story about Indians having a special affinity for her, respecting her because she personifies the feminine presence of the eagle as it flies across Grandmother Moon. One guy even equated her with a legend of the woman who circled Turtle Island, which he made up during lunch hour.

TONTO:  
That was me. White people buy all this kind of stuff.

JANICE:  
This is incredible! Amazing. The media will go crazy. This is the biggest story since ...

BARB:  
Now wait a minute. Don't get carried away.

JANICE:  
But why? This could be ...

BARB:  
... Wrong. She doesn't want publicity. Her first husband was a publisher, and she got sick of all the publicity. She came to Otter Lake to get away from it all.

JANICE:  
But you said everybody in the village knows.

RODNEY:  
Yeah, in the village. Because we're her family now. It's her secret, but it's also ours.

TONTO:  
Telling other people would be like turning in a friend. No can do.

JANICE:  
Then why are you telling me.

BARB:  
Contrary to what you think, you are still family, whether you care or not.

JANICE:  
Then you're taking one hell of a risk.

RODNEY:

Not really. So what if you tell somebody else? You'd look cute on the cover of the *National Enquirer*, but then it would just fade away.

JANICE:

But I'm a respected lawyer. With connections. If I wanted ...

BARB:

Yeah, if you wanted. But I'm hoping you don't want to. No matter how long you've lived out here, I think you still have some Otter Lake in you.

JANICE:

This is all so crazy.

RODNEY:

Yeah, but it kinda makes life interesting, don't you think?

BARB:

You're not going to tell anyone, are you?

JANICE:

I don't understand you. Not more than fifteen minutes ago you were criticizing me about Anne; now you entrust me with this precious secret of yours. What's the game?

BARB:

No game. This is who we are. Family, friends, we stick together.

RODNEY:

Except during band elections.

BARB:

Shut up, Rodney. At our place we always have people dropping in, visiting, calling, whatever. You, yourself, said our place felt like a home. Sorry, but this place doesn't feel like a home to me.

TONTO:

Yeah, bit cold to me, too.

BARB:

The walls look so white, my eyes hurt. Nobody has called - doesn't look like you get many visitors. You seem kinda alone here.

JANICE:

I have friends. I've been away for a while, remember?

BARB:

Alone?

JANICE:

What's that got to do with anything?

BARB:

Where we come from, you have to try, I mean really work at it, to be alone.

RODNEY:

Yeah, and I've tried.

JANICE:

I feel like I'm being cornered by the three of you. I have my life and you have yours. Why don't we just leave it at that.

BARB:

There's always this barrier you put up. Rodney used to be that way, after Paul died.

RODNEY:

But I'm much better now.

JANICE:

The bottom line is I'm happy with my life. That's all that's important. It's getting late, and I've had a long day. I would like to go to bed, if it's okay with you.

BARB: Your apartment.

TONTO: But it's not even eleven yet. I'm just waking up.

JANICE: (to BARB) You and Rodney have the guest room. It's already made up.

RODNEY: Great.

JANICE: And I guess Tonto can have the couch.

TONTO: (less enthusiastically) Great.  
*JANICE exits to the bedroom.*

RODNEY: Come on, it will be just like when you lived with Marie. You spent half your nights on the couch anyway.

TONTO: That couch was a lot warmer place, let me tell you, than Marie ever was. The things I do for you two.

RODNEY: Yeah, like you care.  
*JANICE comes back into the room carrying blankets and a pillow. She puts them on the couch.*

JANICE: This should be okay. Anything else I can get you?

BARB: A cure for night blindness?

JANICE: Help yourselves to the towels on the shelf in the bathroom if you want to shower in the morning.

RODNEY: Oh, look, her towels match. Come, my little crab, into the seafood salad of love.

BARB: I hate it when you talk like that. See you in the morning. We're leaving bright and early.  
*RODNEY and BARB disappear into their bedroom.*

RODNEY: So, did you bring the trapeze?  
*The door closes leaving TONTO and JANICE alone for an awkward moment.*

JANICE: Well, if there's nothing else, I'll be off to bed.

TONTO: What kind of bed do you have?

JANICE: Pardon?

TONTO: Your bed. What kind is it?

JANICE: A queen-size King Koil, why?

TONTO: Awfully big bed. Awfully small couch.

JANICE: Nice try, Tonto. You'll fit on the couch. Bigger and better men than you have slept there.

TONTO:

It was worth a try.

*JANICE sees her luggage sitting by the front door and carries it to her bedroom.*

TONTO:

Need any help carrying those big, heavy suitcases all the way to your room?

JANICE:

I got them here from BC, another few feet won't kill me.

Good night ... Tonto.

*With her luggage, JANICE awkwardly walks to her room as TONTO watches.*

TONTO:

Good night ... Kemosabe.

*Her door closes leaving TONTO onstage alone. He starts to make his bed on the couch.*

TONTO:

The big, beautiful city; a big, beautiful Indian; a big, beautiful bed. Now you'd think all those things would go together, wouldn't you?

*He flops down on the couch.*

TONTO:

We ain't through yet.

*He pulls the blankets up over his head ending the scene.*