

Act II

Scene One

The scene opens on the Otter Lake Reserve in an old, lived-in house. There is a missing wall at one end due to ongoing renovations. The house is empty until JANICE appears in the doorway. Alone and silent. The implications and memories of this house flood her. Finally she enters and slowly glides through the room, taking in the texture and atmosphere of the house she was born in. She stops at a large photograph of Anne and BARB. Her solitude is interrupted when RODNEY, in full song, enters carrying a duffle bag, odds and ends, and the book about Amelia Earhart.

RODNEY:

“Country roads, take me home, to the place I was born, Otter Lake, mountain Mama, take me home, country roads ...”
Thank you. Thank you. Please, hold your applause.

JANICE:

Was that song for my benefit?

RODNEY:

I don't do benefits.

JANICE:

Do you have an “off” button? Travelling in a car with you for three hours is like a cheap trip to Vegas. How does Barb put up with all your high energy all the time?

RODNEY:

Best recipe for a solid relationship: good food, good sex, good times. Not necessarily in that order. I do what I can to keep my little Indian princess happy. I give her the surreal, she gives me the real. Not conventional, I'm sure, but it works for us.

BARB enters.

BARB:

Boy, you really made Tonto's day by letting him park your Saab.

JANICE:

He seemed so taken with it.

RODNEY:

He spent a year as a mechanic, so he has a fondness for good-quality cars.

JANICE:

He will be careful with it, won't he?

RODNEY:

He'll treat it like his own. I think he's in love. You're the first woman he's ever met with a car better than his.

JANICE:

I don't go anywhere without my car.

RODNEY:

Neither does he. Which makes sense considering there's no place to go in, or around, Otter Lake without a car.

BARB:

The place hasn't changed much, has it?

JANICE:

The refrigerator was over there, wasn't it?

BARB:

Good memory. Mom had it moved during the renovations. Do you want to go to the graveyard now?

JANICE:

Not right now.

BARB:

You're not backing out, are you?

JANICE:

Barb, I just got here. I need to rest and adjust first. Not everybody runs on your timetable.

BARB:

(to RODNEY) Did we bring everything in?

RODNEY:

Yep.

BARB:

Anybody want anything to drink?

JANICE:

Ah yes, the quintessential pot of tea. I remember that from my last trip. Do you have any herbal tea?

BARB:

What do you think?

JANICE:

Of course not. I'll pass for now.

BARB:

Think meat and potatoes. That's us. I was nineteen years old before I had lasagna. Twenty-two before I had a stir-fry.

RODNEY:

This is sort of like *Dynasty* meets *The Dukes of Hazzard*.

TONTO enters, holding a car part.

TONTO:

Hey, Grace ...

JANICE:

Please, my name is ...

JANICE, BARB, RODNEY and TONTO:

Janice.

TONTO:

Okay, Janice. Do you know what this is?

JANICE:

It looks like a car part!

TONTO:

It is, but I've never seen anything like it. I got it out of your car. I don't know what it does. I was hoping you would know.

JANICE:

You took it out of my car?! Why did you do that?

TONTO:

Why not?

BARB:

Tonto, put it back.

TONTO:

I intend to. Just curious, that's all.

BARB:

Rodney, go help him.

TONTO:

It's not that difficult.

BARB:

Then go work on the house. There's a hell of a draft coming through the wall over there. Do something. Just get out.

RODNEY:

Barb, what are you trying to say?

TONTO:

Hey, little brother, let's go. I think there's something happening here.

RODNEY:

Oh, woman stuff. Okay then, let's go out and do something manly. Bet I can spit farther than you can.

TONTO:

Gra ... Janice, if you want, I can take you up to the graveyard when you want.

JANICE:

Thank you. Maybe later. After you put the part back.

TONTO:

Okay.

He and RODNEY exit.

JANICE:

Tonto is so different from Rodney. Hard to believe they consider themselves brothers.

BARB:

I know, but Rodney has his serious side. He doesn't like to show it, but it's there. Last Christmas when you left, Mom was in a terrible state. I'm not telling you this to make you feel guilty or anything, just Mom sort of went to pieces. Goddamn, if Rodney wasn't in here trying twice as hard to make us laugh. At first we weren't in the mood, but I'll say this for the guy: he's quite infectious. Normally Rodney doesn't like that sort of family thing. After Paul died, they were really close, he couldn't handle the heavy emotional stuff, and tended to run away from it. But not that time. He stayed the weekend, did most of the cooking, chopped the wood. Everything. While I looked after Mom.

JANICE:

I'm glad somebody was there for you.

BARB:

So am I. Enough of this depressing stuff. Like I said earlier, wanna drink? And I'm not talking about tea.

BARB pulls out a case of beer and drops it with a thump on the table in front of JANICE.

BARB:

Have a drink.

JANICE:

I'm really not a beer drinker.

BARB opens a cupboard door revealing rows of liquor bottles.

BARB:

Fair enough. How about some vodka, rye, rum, gin or tequila?

JANICE:

No, thank you. If I was in the mood for a drink, I would prefer a white wine.

BARB:

Figures you'd prefer white.

BARB grabs a bottle of white wine out of another cupboard and puts it on the table.

JANICE:

Barb, I don't mean this to sound critical, but do you have, by any chance, a drinking problem?

BARB:

With a mother like Anne, I don't think so. The only liquor she would allow in this house was in rum cakes.

JANICE:

Then why ...?

BARB:

Later. This bottle fine?

JANICE:

I'm partial to Chardonnay.

BARB pulls another bottle out and puts it on the table in front of JANICE.

BARB:

French?

JANICE:

Wonderful.

BARB:

Any particular year you're fond of?

JANICE:

Barb, it's barely four o'clock, and I don't feel like a drink.

BARB:

Oh, yes, you do.

BARB finds a corkscrew and attacks the wine bottle.

JANICE:

What are you up to?

BARB:

I bought all this stuff the other day, hoping we could talk you into coming up here.

JANICE:

Why?

BARB:

Because, big sister, I want to get to know you.

JANICE:

You can do that by getting me drunk? Isn't that a little cliché?

BARB:

Mom had a saying, and I think it's true: only drunks and children tell the truth. I want the truth, and you're a little tall to be a child. So, drink up.

BARB hands JANICE her mug of wine. JANICE reads the mug.

JANICE:

"Today is the first day of the rest of your life."

JANICE reads the opposite side of the mug.

JANICE:

"Provided you're not dead already." That's uplifting.

BARB:

A birthday present from Rodney. Sorry, no fancy wine glasses, but I do have some Tupperware, if you ...

JANICE:

This will be fine. You actually brought me up here to get drunk?

BARB:

And say goodbye to Mom.

BARB, with a physical gesture, urges her to drink.

JANICE:

I'm having a problem understanding this. If Anne was against drinking in this house, then ...

BARB:

... Why all this? Mom used to say, "God works in mysterious ways, and so does Barb." Why should the mystery stop with Mom's being gone? You know, you've really got to quit asking why. Especially when it comes to hospitality.

JANICE:

Please, I've had this lecture.

BARB:

Tonto?

JANICE:

The same. Quite an interesting man. Has he ever been to university?

BARB:

He painted the residences at Trent University one summer but that's about it. That's our Tonto.

JANICE:

I bet if he really applied himself ... Rodney, too.

BARB:

Don't underestimate Rodney. He's taken more university and college courses than there are pearls in your necklace. They're both kind of the same. They just learn what they want to know, then move on.

JANICE:

Some would consider that a waste of time and money.

BARB:

Not everybody wants to be a lawyer. Some people are happy being who they are.

JANICE:

What if who they are is a lawyer.

BARB:

Then God help them. Cheers.

BARB forcibly toasts with JANICE, and they drink, though JANICE is still unsure. BARB refills the slightly drained cup, and she continues to do this at every opportunity.

BARB:

Lighten up there, Janice-Grace. Sit down, put your feet up, suck it back. Make yourself at home.

JANICE:

You do this often?

BARB:

Nah, can't drink like I used to, not like when I was a kid. Takes days to recover now. And besides, Rodney acts the fool enough for both of us, the entire reserve, maybe the country.

JANICE:

I see.

BARB:

This is an example of what I mean about me spilling everything, but not you. You just sit there so prim and proper, keeping quiet while the world around you blabs on.

JANICE:

If you remember correctly, the last time I was here, I left in tears. I'd hardly call that prim and proper.

BARB:

Yeah, but you didn't tell us why you were crying.

JANICE:

Wasn't it obvious?

BARB:

Maybe, maybe not. The point is you ran away when you started crying, like it was a weakness. Families were created for weaknesses.

JANICE:

Barb the philosopher.

BARB:

Barb the realist.

JANICE:

Reality is what you make it.

BARB:

No, reality is what it makes of you. Oh my God, I sound like Tonto.

JANICE:

Can we do something about all this liquor? I feel like a drunken businessman will try to pick me up any moment.

BARB:

You got it.

They both get up and move the liquor to the counter.

JANICE:

So what is the case with you and Rodney? Is he going to move in with you now?

BARB:

He's been here almost constantly since Mom ... you know. He's been very good. Even been sleeping on the couch at nights. When Mom was alive, we had too much respect to do anything in the house. Then, well ... last night at your place was the first time we'd slept together since it happened.

JANICE:

Remind me to wash those sheets. You haven't answered my question. Is Rodney going to be moving in with you?

BARB:

Why do you want to know?

JANICE:

Discovery is a two-way street.

Beat.

BARB:

I don't know what we're gonna do. Maybe we'll build a new house and shut this one down. It's that room.

JANICE:

What room?

BARB: Mom's room. I can't go in there. Even after four days, it makes me feel too weird. I just hope it doesn't turn into one of those dust-covered shrines weird old people have.

JANICE: Tell me about her. About Anne. I knew her for less than an hour. I want to know more.

BARB goes to the doorway of Anne's room.

BARB: Let me show you something.

BARB hovers in the doorway.

BARB: I can't go in. Grace, you'll have to.

JANICE: For the thousandth time, my name is ...

BARB: (pointing) Right there. That package. Get it.

BARB returns to the table, and JANICE enters the room and returns carrying a wrapped box.

JANICE: What's this?

BARB: Your birthday present from March. Mom was hoping some day you'd show up and she could give it to you in person. That's the kind of mother she was. And, like everything else, that responsibility now falls to me.

JANICE: I don't like that attitude. Quit making me out to be a villain. I'm not.

BARB: Are you going to open the present or not?

JANICE: In a minute.

BARB: "In a minute"?! Your first present from your birth mother and you say, "In a minute"?!

JANICE: These are unfamiliar waters for me. I want to take it slow and calm. That's why I left last time. It was too much too soon. I crumbled. Thirty-five years stuffed into an hour.

BARB: We did a little crumbling ourselves.

JANICE: Was she buried beside Paul?

BARB: Of course. And Dad. The funeral even made the local papers. Wanna see?

JANICE: Please.

BARB: Most of the reserve came, and quite a few from town. The only time she ever made the papers: when she won that lottery money, and when she died.

JANICE: I recognize the church from the drive in. I take it she was well respected.

BARB: "Respect" isn't the word. Mom was ... Mom. Everybody knew her.

JANICE: Who's that old woman in the wheelchair?

BARB:

Oh, that's Amy, Amelia Earhart.

JANICE:

Not that again. I'm sorry, I don't buy it.

BARB:

You don't have to buy it. Look out the window. Go ahead.

Hesitant but defiant, JANICE goes to the window.

BARB:

See the brown brick house way down there?

JANICE:

Yeah?

BARB:

That's where she lives.

Beat.

JANICE:

Amelia Earhart, who has been missing for over fifty-five years, the focus of one of the greatest, continuous searches in history, lives in a small brown brick building on the Otter Lake Reserve in Ontario, Canada?

BARB:

Why not? Elvis could be a making lacrosse sticks in Six Nations for all we know.

JANICE:

If that is her, how the hell did she get here?

BARB:

Easy. Her plane went down in the ocean. It sank in eight minutes with her navigator. She was picked up the next day by a Filipino fishing boat. Nobody spoke English and they didn't know who she was. Two weeks later she arrives at some small fishing port in the Philippines, travelling ... what's that word ... incognito. All that time in the sun had

made her very dark. She dyed her hair black. Bought passage on a boat to the States. A month later she's here. Simple.

JANICE:

But why? It makes no sense. What's the motivation. Why here? This little out-of-the-way jerkwater Indian Reserve in the middle of nowhere.

BARB:

She was in love. We had a lot of ironworkers come from around here. A lot worked in New York for months at a time. She met Adam Williams, the man who owned that house.

JANICE:

But wasn't she married?

BARB:

To some publisher-type guy, but it wasn't much of a marriage.

JANICE:

So you're telling me Amelia Earhart ran off with an Indian ironworker. Just like that?

BARB:

You haven't seen our ironworkers. It was a perfect opportunity. She was supposed to be dead. She was tired of all the publicity and headaches. Hello, Otter Lake. She liked what this place had to offer. It became home.

JANICE:

This is too weird.

BARB:

This is Otter Lake.

JANICE:

I still don't believe you.

BARB:

Wanna meet her?

JANICE:

What?

BARB:

Wanna meet her? I know she's home right now. We could go visit. I know she wants to meet you. Mom told her all about you.

JANICE:

I don't know ...

BARB:

Afraid of the truth? It is Amelia Earhart. And I'm going to prove it to you.

BARB goes to the window and yells.

BARB:

Hey, you two, come here. (to JANICE) Get your shoes on.

JANICE:

Do you think we should?

BARB:

Definitely.

RODNEY and TONTO enter.

RODNEY:

You yelled, sweetness?

BARB:

I want you or him to drive us down to Amy's, okay, sweetie?

TONTO:

Sweetie? Have you been drinking?

The boys see all the liquor.

TONTO:

Holy mackerel! Where'd all that come from?

RODNEY:

Must be a chief's convention in town.

BARB:

You leave that stuff alone. That's for Grace and me.

TONTO:

You got a stomach pump to go with it?

BARB:

Just drive us, okay? We'll take care of the rest. Let's go.

BARB and JANICE get up to leave.

JANICE:

Oh, Barb, I'm out of wine.

BARB:

No problem, got more, lots more. It ain't a Chardonnay, but around here we have a saying: beggars can't be choosers. You'll just have to force down this Beaujolais.

JANICE:

Philistines. No more Chardonnay. I'm going to complain to the manager.

BARB:

Rodney, grab me a couple beers. I'm running low.

The women walk out giggling.

TONTO:

What the hell was all that?

RODNEY:

Be afraid, be very afraid.

BARB:

(*offstage*) Rodney!

RODNEY:

Coming, dear.

RODNEY grabs some beers.

TONTO:

You know what's going on, don't you?

RODNEY:

Relax, things are going smoothly. Just as I planned.

TONTO:

Any smoother they'll be unconscious.