

(PHYLLIS exits. MILES and JACK saunter in and ease into chairs around a table. MILES starts to uncapsule the Byron champagne.)

JACK. I sincerely hope we're not tucking into a long evening here.

MILES. Don't worry, it's cool.

(PHYLLIS returns, bringing with her three champagne glasses.)

Mom, what the fuck's up with those Marie Antoinette glasses?

PHYLLIS. Watch your language.

JACK. Yeah, watch your language.

(Everyone laughs. MILES is opening the bottle.)

MILES. The secret to opening champagne is once you feel the cork start to release, keep the pressure against it as it rises. The goal is to hear just the slightest little sound, like a very prim and proper lady disguising a fart.

(And just at that moment we hear the slightest "Thfft.")

PHYLLIS. Oh, Miles, don't be so crude.

(MILES holds up the bottle.)

MILES. Some wine expert once calculated the number of bubbles in a bottle and determined that the way most people open champagne they lose half of them in the uncorking alone.

JACK. Pour us a glass, Dom Perignon, before you lose the bubbles.

(MILES pours them all around. JACK holds up his glass for a toast.)

To Mrs. Raymond on her...uh...fifty-ninth birthday!

PHYLLIS. Oh, stop it.

JACK. Well, you don't look a day over sixty, Phyllis.

PHYLLIS. Thank you.

JACK. You should join the Santa Barbara Polo & Racquet Club and find yourself a millionaire.

PHYLLIS. I'll toast to that.

(To MILES.) Your father was so cheap. I remember when I wanted to go to Hawaii...

MILES. All right, Mom, all right. Dad just died a year ago.

PHYLLIS. *(Sniffing.)* I know, I miss him, too.

(Abruptly changing tone.)

But, I don't miss that Gallo Hearty Burgundy. I'm drinking the finest now.

(PHYLLIS throws back her glass of champagne.

MILES refills her as if he knows her drinking habits all too well. She sips some more.)

Woo. This champagne's going to my head. I'm flying with the angels!

(To JACK.) So, you're really getting married?

JACK. Yep. Tying the knot. And your Miles is going to be my best man.

PHYLLIS. That's nice.

(Turns to MILES.) Miles, when are you going to get married again?

MILES. I just got divorced, Mom. Once I figure out where I went wrong I might be able to give the idea renewed consideration.

PHYLLIS. 'Cause I was reading this article and it said that people who live alone and don't believe in God have higher risk factors for all kinds of diseases and die young.

MILES. *(Raising his glass.)* I believe in God! Bacchus. He watcheth over me.

PHYLLIS. Oh, stop joshing me. I'm worried about you, that's all.

(JACK is holding out his glass. MILES refills it, then his, then tops off his mother's. Grimaces at the empty bottle.)

MILES. Could you excuse me? I'm going to go out to the car and get...the other bottle of champagne.

(MILES rises from the table as JACK's face disorganizes into an expression as though he knows MILES is up to something other than champagne.)

(MILES exits into an adjoining room that now lights up as his mother's sitting room.)

(MILES raises a large, framed wedding photo of him and his now ex-wife Victoria. MILES eavesdrops on JACK and PHYLLIS's conversation as he stares wistfully at the picture, its youth mocking him. PHYLLIS is a little slurry now. Their voices issue from the semi-dark over MILES's aloneness.)

PHYLLIS. Do Miles and Victoria see each other anymore?

JACK. I think they're trying to get back together, Phyllis.

PHYLLIS. Would she *take him* back? He's got so many problems.

JACK. Miles's got some good qualities. He's damn funny when he's not down.

PHYLLIS. But he's always down, isn't he? I've never known anyone so depressed. We must have raised him wrong.

JACK. Last year's been kind of rough on him. He's a writer. They get bummed out a lot.

(MILES noiselessly flips the photo over. He unfastens the cardboard backing and finds a packet of \$100 bills. He counts out \$1,000, pockets it, quickly reassembles the photo frame, throws it one last wistful look, all the while enduring the critical commentary of JACK and his mother. The lights extinguish him in the darkness of his dirty deed.)

(JACK straightens from the table.)

Remind me where your bathroom is, Mrs. Raymond.

PHYLLIS. *(Gesticulating.)* Oh, it's through that door, down the hall, on the right.

(JACK nods and exits. PHYLLIS sneaks some more champagne, shaking her head to herself. As if still in conversation with JACK:)

I just don't understand why he won't get his teaching credential, find a good paying job, meet someone nice and settle down.

(PHYLLIS pours champagne from Miles and Jack's glasses into hers, takes a healthy slug, and continues on:)

All that money for college down the drain. It's that damn writing of his that caused his marriage to fail.

(Raises her glass.)

And all those...God damn liberal arts professors. Ought to fire the lot of them!

(PHYLLIS rises with her glass and exits the stage...)

How was he ever going to make a living? He's no Raymond Chandler. Now, there was a real writer!