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SF PERUSALS

For Better

by

Eric Coble



SAMUEL FRENCH

FOUNDED 1830

NEW YORK HOLLYWOOD LONDON TORONTO

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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For Better was originally commissioned by Curious Theatre Company, Chip Walton, Producing Artistic Director. This Commission was funded in part by a grant from the National New Play Network

The world premiere of ***FOR BETTER*** was produced by Curious Theatre Company in Denver, CO on November 3, 2007. It was directed by Chip Walton with the following cast and crew:

MICHAEL . . . . . John Arp
LIZZIE . . . . . Rhonda Brown
STUART . . . . . Ed Cord
FRANCINE . . . . . Dee Covington
KAREN . . . . . Lisa Rosenhagen
WALLY . . . . . Jim Zeiger

Set by Michael Durna, Lights by Richard Devin, Costumes by Brynn Coplan, Sound design by Brian Freeland, Properties by Jennifer Orell, Assistant Directed by Pesha Rudnick, Stage Managed by Lisa Boehm and Assistant Stage Managed by Paul Turley.

FOR BETTER opened November 8, 2007 at New Theatre, Coral Gables, FL; Ricky Martinez, Artistic Director; Eileen Suarez, Managing Director. It was directed by Ricky Martinez. The cast was as follows:

WALLY . . . . . Kevin Reilley
KAREN . . . . . Kay Ostrenko
FRANCINE . . . . . Kim Ostrenko
MICHAEL . . . . . Christopher Vicchiollo
STUART . . . . . John Manzelli
LIZZIE . . . . . Evelyn Perez

Set by Jesse Dreikosen, Costumes by K. Blair Brown, Lights by Patrick Tennent, Sound by Clint Hooper.

FOR BETTER opened April 2, 2008 at Southern Rep, New Orleans, LA; Ryan Rylette, Producing Artistic Director; Aimee Hayes, Artistic Director. It was directed by Gary Rucker. The cast was as follows:

WALLY . . . . . George Sanchez
KAREN . . . . . Ashley Ricord
FRANCINE . . . . . Aimee Hayes
MICHAEL . . . . . Leon Contavesprie
STUART . . . . . Sean Patterson
LIZZIE . . . . . Veronica Russell

Set by David Raphel, Lights by Marty Sachs, Costumes by Elizabeth Parent, Sound by Michael Singleton.

CHARACTERS

WALLY BAEDEKER. A Man Who's Been Married; Karen's Father, 60's.
KAREN BAEDEKER. A Woman Who Wants to Be, 30's.
FRANCINE DEXTER. A Woman Who Is Married; Karen's Sister, 40's.
MICHAEL DEXTER. The Man Francine Married, 40's.
STUART TRAMONTANE. A Man Who is Buffeted, 30's.
LIZZIE MONOHAN. A Woman Who Floats, 30's.

PLACE

Various locales across the globe.

TIME

Now.

PRODUCTION NOTES

FOR BETTER is meant to be performed by SIX actors of any ethnic group. The scenes should be staged in as many different areas and levels of the theatre as possible – including in the audience – with Wally's couch and living room the only stable focal point.

*(**SETTING:** A mostly bare stage representing various locations around the world.)*

*(**AT RISE:** A woman in a business suit,* **KAREN BAEDEKER**, *stands beside her father,* **WALLY**, *in a bathrobe and slippers next to a well-worn couch and end table with an old phone sitting on it.)*

(This is **WALLY***'s living room.)*

WALLY. Does it have to be here and now?

KAREN. My plane leaves in two hours, Dad, I want to talk face to face –

WALLY. – cause you know I'd do anything for you.

KAREN. I know.

WALLY. – but my programs are coming on.

KAREN. I know.

WALLY. It's "Kojak" and "Rockford Files," sweetheart. Back to back. It's the centerpiece of my day.

KAREN. That's what the TiVo is for, Dad, so we can have talks like this *and* you can get your shows.

WALLY. That's a good point. That's true. Except the TiVo thing is still kind of in the box.

KAREN. Why didn't you hook it up?

WALLY. Oh, you know, those damn instructions –

KAREN. I would've hooked it up, you could've called me to set it up –

WALLY. My Karie's got nothing better to do than hook up her old man's gizmos –

KAREN. Where is it? Where's the box?

WALLY. Over by the door where the UPS guy left it.

KAREN. Dad!

WALLY. I'm uncomfortable with it, Karie. You want me to say it, there I said it. TiVo scares me.

KAREN. Oh, Dad –

WALLY. The VCR was bad enough, honey, it'd come clicking on recording at all hours of the night on the wrong days – it's like I got ghosts in my house, whatdoyoucallem, poltergeists, Karie. I already got enough spirits following me without some damn machine whirring away –

KAREN. TiVo's silent. You'll never know it's here –

WALLY. It stays in the box, I'll never know it's here either.

KAREN. Okay. This is a different conversation, we can have this conversation when I get back – right now I need to tell you something.

WALLY. What if you tell me and I have the T.V. on at the same time?

KAREN. Dad, please.

WALLY. I'll mute it. Just the picture.

KAREN. Dad!

*(***WALLY** *pauses. Looks at the remote in his hand. At his daughter. Smiles and puts the remote down as he sits.)*

WALLY. I saw these shows when they came on the first time, you'd think I didn't need to see 'em again.

KAREN. *(sitting beside him)* But they were good shows.

WALLY. They *were* good shows. Those were shows you could *watch*. Your mother and I, we *watched* those shows. She loved James Garner. Loved him.

KAREN. *(wiping her eyes)* I know.

WALLY. What. What's wrong? I'm sorry. Sweetheart, I'm sorry, we'll do the TiVo. You come back and show me how –

KAREN. No. No! It's just… I wish Mom was here.

(Beat. **WALLY** *sits again.)*

WALLY. Yeah. Me too.

*(***KAREN** *looks at her watch, pulls out her cell phone and sets it on the couch between them. They wait.* **WALLY** *looks at the phone…)*

WALLY. *(continued)* You're… you're not expecting Mom to call us are you?

KAREN. No! But I am expecting a call.

WALLY. I thought we were going to have a talk.

KAREN. We are. Right after the call. The call is for you.

WALLY. Oh, Jesus, Dr. Lehman got the results back, didn't he? It's not just hemorrhoids, is it? Oh god, oh Jesus –

KAREN. No, Dad!

WALLY. He said more fiber – you all said more fiber, but did I listen?

KAREN. It's not Dr. Lehman! Dr. Lehman wouldn't be calling me, he'd call you and he said he's 99% sure it was nothing, right?

WALLY. 99% – he did say 99% –

KAREN. Dad, this isn't medical. This call is good news. 100% good news.

WALLY. Holy Pete. My whole life was flashing before my eyes.

KAREN. I'm sorry.

WALLY. You ever have that happen? Whoosh, flash –

KAREN. No, no, I haven't.

WALLY. Well, yours would be shorter. You know.

KAREN. I know.

*(***KAREN** *looks at her watch. Checks her phone.)*

WALLY. They late?

KAREN. A little late. Probably caught in a meeting. But he knows I have to get to the airport…

WALLY. Why is someone calling me on your phone?

KAREN. You'll see.

*(They wait. Looking at the phone…***KAREN** *looks at her watch.)*

He's usually really punctual.

WALLY. He who.

KAREN. Max. Max Aphelion.

WALLY. Ah. *(beat)* And Max Aphelion is not a doctor.

KAREN. Not at all. *(beat)* I think he's my fiancé.

*(***WALLY** *stares at her).*

I'm getting married, Dad.

*(***WALLY** *stares at her.)*

Is that okay?

(He stands, sits, stands.)

WALLY. Oh!…Karen. Oh. Karen. Karen! Oh! This is –

KAREN. Are you okay with it?

WALLY. Oh, sweetheart – this is worth missing "Kojak" for!

(He hugs her, she's laughing.)

Sweetheart!

KAREN. Is it great?

WALLY. Oh god! Sweetheart!

KAREN. It's great, isn't it?

WALLY. I didn't know you were seeing anyone!

KAREN. I wasn't! We just met – not *just* met, we met at the International Retail Foods Conference in Tampa last year and we've only seen each other twice since then, but we talk everyday – multiple times everyday – I haven't actually seen him in two months but he asked me to marry him! He proposed! Which is so like him once you get to know him – he just does it, he thinks, he does it – everyone else in food management is so "stay with the itinerary," "stick to the Power Point," but he's all instinct, and his instinct was to fall in love and mine was too and his instinct was to propose and mine was to accept, I think, I mean, I think it's okay, right, and he's calling you to ask for my hand in marriage, your permission –

WALLY. Wow.

KAREN. He's very old-fashioned. Impulsive and old-fashioned. Be nice to him, please be nice to him!

WALLY. Of course I'm gonna be nice, but why doesn't he, he could drop by. I could make some Stouffer's Macaroni –

KAREN. He's in Montreal until Tuesday. But he was going to call at 1:15. I don't know why he hasn't called…

WALLY. You only met him twice?

KAREN. But we talk every day, and send pictures, text messages – I see him and hear him more than I see anyone else I know – here –

(showing her cell phone screen)

Here's what he looks like. This was in the Tampa Airport right before I flew to Detroit and he went to Istanbul.

WALLY. His head's a little big.

KAREN. That's the angle of the phone camera. Here's him in Turkey. He e-mailed me these photos –

(pushing buttons)

In Seattle. Sao Paolo. Houston.

WALLY. You sure he's not a drug runner?

KAREN. I don't think so. No! Why? Do you think he is?

WALLY. A mule or whatever they call'em?

KAREN. He works for Starbucks.

WALLY. He can't hold down a job at the one on the corner?

KAREN. He's in management. He's a scout. A location scout for new Starbucks all over the world.

WALLY. Oh well, that's probably a real interesting job.

KAREN. You should read his letters.

WALLY. And he's a looker.

KAREN. You think so? I think so.

WALLY. No, his head's not that big or nothing. He's a good lookin' man.

KAREN. I don't know why he hasn't called –

(dialing)

I'll call him –

WALLY. It's kind of neat, you're both in food service. Sort of. Gives you something to talk about. Your mother and I, we'd talk about my construction jobs, you know,

but after a few years pouring concrete in one high-rise is pouring concrete in any high-rise, you know? But she'd listen, you know –

KAREN. *(into phone)* Hey, Max, it's Karen. I'm at my dad's but I'm heading to the airport in a minute so….I was just wondering if you'd be calling. Hope everything's okay. I love you. Bye.

(She hangs up. Looks at **WALLY**. *Pause.)*

WALLY. You love him?

KAREN. He, um, I was eating breakfast at the hotel and he just walked up and sat down beside me. There were no other tables available, it was the Sheraton Buffet Breakfast, which is always crowded, and we started talking about coffee and branding and seating capacity and we were both laughing, and he has these great eyes and this laugh, it's like a snort, but cute – and I just had the urge to touch him. To hold his hand or something, I wanted to feel him…and I'm thinking how wildly inappropriate, as usual, I am – and I focus on my orange juice and he reaches over…and takes my hand. Just for a minute. Less than a minute. Without saying anything. He just wanted to touch me. And then he gets up to get me more hash browns and we spent the whole rest of the day talking and walking… And we've been kind of doing that ever since. *(beat)*

WALLY. Then you better get to the airport. Give him my number. Have him call me. I want to welcome him to the family.

(She hugs him, practically bouncing.)

KAREN. Oh, thank you thank you thank you, you think it's okay?

WALLY. Will you stop asking that? Do *you* think it's okay?

KAREN. Of course! I think. Maybe he can e-mail you his proposal–

WALLY. No e-mails. I do not do e-mails.

KAREN. Right. Sorry. I forgot.

WALLY. With the little smiley faces, winking, frowning, it's like trying to read a goddam cartoon telegram.

KAREN. He'll call you –

WALLY. Have you told your sister?

KAREN. *(takes his hand)* I wanted to do it with you.

*(***WALLY** *stands beside* **KAREN** *while she dials, barely keeping it together – wriggling in place…)*

(Then another woman in business clothes, **FRANCINE***, wheels into a different area in an office chair with her laptop, answering her cell phone.)*

FRANCINE. *(into phone)* Hello?

KAREN. Francine – Oh, Francie, Francie, Francie, Francie –

FRANCINE. Karen? Is that you? Are you okay?

KAREN. Ohmygod, ohmygod, ohmygod, ohmygod –

WALLY. You're gonna hyperventilate, you better sit down –

FRANCINE. You need to hang up and call 911, or I'll call it for you, where are you?

KAREN. It's gonna happen, Daddy said it's really gonna happen so it's gonna happen –

FRANCINE. Did Dr. Lehman call? What's going on?

KAREN. He proposed! I mean he hasn't called back yet but he proposed!

FRANCINE. Dad proposed? To who?

KAREN. Max! Max asked me to marry him! Max and me, me and Max –

FRANCINE. Do we know a Max?

KAREN. Max from Starbucks!

FRANCINE. You're marrying a guy you just met at Starbucks?

KAREN. He works for Starbucks! Isn't it great? Oh my god, I think I'm getting married, Francine, I'm getting married, I'm getting married –

FRANCINE. Hang on, wait, I've got another call –

(A man in a suit, tie and easy smile, wheels into a different area in a rolling chair, holding a steering wheel and talking into his cell phone. This is **MICHAEL***.)*

MICHAEL. *(into phone, to* **FRANCINE***)* Hey, Sweets, where are you?

FRANCINE. Oh my god, Michael honey, Karen's getting married.

KAREN. *(to herself as* **WALLY** *tries to seat her)* I'm getting married I'm getting married I'm getting married –

MICHAEL. Karen?

FRANCINE. Getting married.

MICHAEL. She met somebody on the road?

FRANCINE. At a Starbucks.

WALLY. It's gonna be fine, it's gonna be fine, it's gonna be fine –

MICHAEL. I think I missed that, I thought you said Starbucks –

FRANCINE. Where are you – can I call you back?

MICHAEL. I didn't think your sister even went to Starbucks –

FRANCINE. *(punching a button on her phone, To* **KAREN***)* What Starbucks was this?

KAREN. I didn't meet him in Starbucks – he works for Starbucks.

FRANCINE. What?

*(***STUART***, a man in a windbreaker and jeans jogs into a different area with a map and cell phone.)*

MICHAEL. *(into phone)* What.

STUART. Hello, Michael, it's Stuart, can you hear me?

MICHAEL. Long time no contact, dude. Where are you?

STUART. In the field, wanted to see if my phone could reach you from here. I'm in a ravine –

KAREN. He's based in the Midwest Headquarters in St. Louis.

STUART. I'm in Kyrgyzstan. Somewhere.

FRANCINE. *(to* **KAREN***)* Are you in St. Louis?

KAREN. I'm at Dad's. Max called me and I came to see Dad –

FRANCINE. He proposed over the phone?

MICHAEL. Guess who just got proposed to?

STUART. Did you say proposed?

MICHAEL & FRANCINE. Karen!

KAREN & STUART. What?

FRANCINE. What do you know about this guy?

STUART. Karen Baedeker?

KAREN. Max Aphelion. Isn't that a great name? He's great, Francine, I think you'll love him, I hope you'll love him, he's funny and sweet and smart –

FRANCINE & STUART. You're kidding me.

KAREN & MICHAEL. I think it's kind of great.

KAREN. I've been alone for so long.

MICHAEL. She's been alone for so long.

FRANCINE. Wait, I've got another call. Hang on –

(A woman in comfy clothes walks into a different area with her cell phone. This is **LIZZIE**.*)*

LIZZIE. *(to* **FRANCINE***)* Hello, Francie-Pants, where are you?

FRANCINE. Hi, Lizzie –

STUART. Are you driving? 'Cause you're fading in and out –

MICHAEL. I'm driving.

FRANCINE. I'm in San Diego, Karen's on the other line, I think you need to talk to her –

LIZZIE. I'm trying on new contacts, I was wondering what color eyes I should have today –

MICHAEL. Can you hear me now? I'm out from under the overpass –

STUART. I just sort of can't believe she's getting married.

FRANCINE. *(to* **LIZZIE***)* I'm hooking up a conference call –

LIZZIE. Francine –

KAREN. Lizzie?

MICHAEL. Can you hear me now?

STUART. I can hear you now.

FRANCINE. Can the three of us hear each other?

LIZZIE. Karen, I'm trying on contacts, what color eyes do you think I should have today?

KAREN. Lizzie, I'm getting married!

LIZZIE. What?

STUART. She wasn't even seeing anyone last time we talked –

MICHAEL. Yeah, but when was that?

LIZZIE. When did this happen?

KAREN. Just now.

STUART. Two months ago.

KAREN. His name is Max Aphelion – he just proposed.

LIZZIE. *(squeals and claps)* OH Karen Karen Karen Karen Karen –

FRANCINE. Oh god.

MICHAEL. *(overlapping)* A lot can happen in two months, buddy. Anyway, what do you care?

MICHAEL & KAREN. Isn't it great?

LIZZIE. Yes, it's great!! **STUART.** Yeah, it's great.
It's…wow!! It's wow.

LIZZIE. "Max Aphelion," what a great name –

FRANCINE. I want to know more about this guy.

MICHAEL. I'm losing you.

KAREN. Francine, will you help me pick out a wedding dress?

LIZZIE. I'll help you get a dress!

KAREN. Francine, will you help me pick a dress?

LIZZIE. I would so love to pick out a dress!

MICHAEL. I'm between some buildings –

LIZZIE. I'm between phones, guys, my battery's going – I have to hang up –

KAREN. What? I couldn't hear you.

STUART. Can you hear me now?

FRANCINE. Karen, I have to run. I'll call you tonight –

LIZZIE & MICHAEL. Can you hear me?

KAREN. Just say "congratulations," Francie, please, just say "congratulations" –

STUART. I'm losing you –

LIZZIE. Congratulations, Karen!

FRANCINE. I'm losing you, Lizzie.

MICHAEL. I'm losing you, Stuart.

KAREN. Did you hear me, Francie?

LIZZIE & STUART. Can you hear me now?

KAREN. Please just say "congratulations"?

LIZZIE & STUART & MICHAEL. Can you hear me?

KAREN. Please?

LIZZIE, KAREN, STUART, MICHAEL & FRANCINE. Can you hear me?

ALL. I'm hanging up.

(They do. Beat. **KAREN** *turns to face her father.)*

WALLY. Did she say congratulations?

KAREN. I, um, I have to get to the airport. I'll call you.

(A quick hug and she darts out. **WALLY** *follows her.* **LIZZIE** *and* **STUART** *exit as* **FRANCINE** *redials* **MICHAEL.***)*

FRANCINE. Michael, honey.

MICHAEL. Hey, babe. That's awesome about Karen – I'll give her a jingle –

FRANCINE. Awesome? She has one good Frappuccino Grande and she starts hearing wedding bells –

MICHAEL. Honey, if she says she's in love –

FRANCINE. It's a fine line between love and desperation.

MICHAEL. Well, sure.

FRANCINE. Karen's not even looking down to see where that line is – somebody's gotta look down, Michael.

MICHAEL. Absolutely.

FRANCINE. Will you Google Max Aphelion and Starbucks and see what you find?

MICHAEL. I'm on my way to a client.

FRANCINE. So am I! I'm going into a group in two minutes –

MICHAEL. What's the focus?

FRANCINE. It's for Charles Schwab. They want to see if people want to invest more when they see a picture of a mountain, the ocean, or a wheat field.

MICHAEL. Mountain. Totally.

FRANCINE. Why.

MICHAEL. Steady. Solid. Forever.

FRANCINE. Does it matter if it's a blue sky or overcast behind the mountain?

MICHAEL. Overcast means storm, means we'll stand through wind and rain.

FRANCINE. Birds in the sky flying toward the mountain.

MICHAEL. Distracting. I'm not putting my IRA in birds.

FRANCINE. But people looking at the ocean photo feel sexier and more daring, more willing to take risks.

MICHAEL. I can see that.

FRANCINE. So we're testing responses to a big phallic island in the ocean. Best of both worlds – maybe a couple of subliminal dolphins mating in the waves.

MICHAEL. Then they should have prairie dogs humping in the wheat field.

FRANCINE. And that's why I don't invite you to my focus groups. And this has nothing to do with the crisis at hand, Michael. I need the 411 on Max Aphelion. I think she said something about St. Louis –

MICHAEL. I can do some fishing this afternoon –

FRANCINE. Or get Lizzie. She's better on the web than all of us combined.

MICHAEL. Lizzie Monohan?

FRANCINE. You know another Lizzie?

MICHAEL. She's your friend, talking to her is your job, not mine.

FRANCINE. I was just on the line with her when her cell went out – you'll have to use her landline – do you have her landline?

MICHAEL. Not if she's moved since our wedding…

FRANCINE. She's moved six times since then. I'll text it to you if you don't. Get her sniffing around, sil vous plait. I'll call you after my group, love you, bye!

(And she leaves. **MICHAEL** *hangs up, steers, looks at his phone and redials.* **LIZZIE** *re-enters carrying a laptop and checking out contact lenses, with her phone cord stretching offstage.)*

LIZZIE. Hello?

MICHAEL. Lizzie! It's Michael! How you doin'?

LIZZIE. Michael! Oh my god! How are you? Which Michael is this?

MICHAEL. Michael Dexter.

LIZZIE. Michael! Oh my god! How are you? It's been forever! How'd you get my landline?

MICHAEL. Francine had it.

LIZZIE. Oh that is so cool that you guys still talk. I know so many people – married people – who just don't talk anymore, you know?

MICHAEL. I know –

LIZZIE. Or wives who don't let their husbands talk to other women, or you know, former lovers or whatever, jealously is such a hideous monster, don't you think?

MICHAEL. Absolutely.

LIZZIE. Are you driving? It sounds like you're driving?

MICHAEL. I am driving –

LIZZIE. Where are you? Oh my god, are you in town? You're not driving to my house, are you? Tell me you're not driving to my house, it is such a sty –

MICHAEL. I'm not driving to your house. Not unless you moved to the Gentle Hearth Retirement Community in Tulsa.

LIZZIE. No, I've never been to Tulsa. Is it beautiful? Is it flat? Does it smell?

MICHAEL. Why would it smell?

LIZZIE. Are you looking at retiring there? I thought you were from Denver? Won't you go back to Denver to die, like salmon swimming back upstream?

MICHAEL. I'm with Advantage Plus –

LIZZIE. That's right! Francie told me – you're in insurance!

MICHAEL. Just for satellite dishes. We only offer policies on dishes and cable lines.

LIZZIE. And the old people want their satellite dishes insured?

MICHAEL. I sure as hell hope so.

LIZZIE. That is so cool that you take care of the entertainment needs of our elders. I love that.

MICHAEL. You still with Amazon?

LIZZIE. God no, I'm strictly E-Bay now.

MICHAEL. Ah.

LIZZIE. I make sure the seller ratings are up-to-date and accurate.

MICHAEL. Wow.

LIZZIE. It's huge. It's like being an air traffic controller, except here people's lives are at stake, you know?

MICHAEL. Are you on the job now?

LIZZIE. I don't have to check every second, Michael. It's like being a dominatrix. You just kind of hover, watching intently, listening for clues, ready to swing your metal-studded paddle at just the right moment. You know?

(Beat. **MICHAEL** *drives.* **LIZZIE** *sits.)*

MICHAEL. Um. So you, ah, your house is still a sty, huh?

LIZZIE. Please. If I wouldn't clean it up when you were around, you think I'll dust when I'm on my own?

MICHAEL. Right.

(Pause. He drives. She bites her lip and types.)

LIZZIE. So you like it? Advantage Plus?

MICHAEL. It's got solid bennies. Nobody watching my every move, you know.

LIZZIE. Yeah, you always had that sneaky element –

MICHAEL. I'm not sneaky –

LIZZIE. Stealthy spy-boy thing. Back when we were together – before you even met Francine, you were still always like, "I wonder if I can get away with this?"

MICHAEL. Look who's talking!

LIZZIE. Well, but see, it never occurred to me that anything I did was wrong, so I never snuck. Are you sneaking now?

MICHAEL. No! Francine asked me to call! She wants you to check on –

LIZZIE. Karen! Oh my god, that's right, of course she would, isn't that wonderful? I mean not the suspicious, doubting Thomas pessimist thing, but the true love thing, the Karen getting married thing!

MICHAEL. It's a fine line between love and desperation, Lizzie, and I'm not sure Karen's looking down right now.

LIZZIE. What?

MICHAEL. Francine's just – we're both just worried she doesn't know what she's getting into.

LIZZIE. It's just marriage. It's not like buying a car.

MICHAEL. Exactly. Just picture every time Karen's ever bought a car, except there's no lemon laws to bail her out this time.

LIZZIE. She sounded so happy in the eight seconds we were on the phone together –

MICHAEL. And we want her to stay happy. Can you just snoop around a little – see who Max Aphelion out of St. Louis Starbucks HQ is.

LIZZIE. Like criminal records?

MICHAEL. Sexual harassments, embezzlement, xeroxing his private parts –

LIZZIE. What's wrong with xeroxing your private parts?

MICHAEL. You can't just go throwing love to just anybody – if Karen won't protect her heart, it's up to us.

LIZZIE. It sounds like her heart's already gone. All we can do now is try to shove the oozing thing back into her empty chest cavity.

MICHAEL. I think we're all praying that won't be necessary.

(parks his car)

I'm at my meeting. Will you check? Please?

LIZZIE. …I'll report back to Francine.

MICHAEL. Or I'll call you. Or you call me. You know.

LIZZIE. Just like old times. Say hello to the old people.

(She hangs up…pauses…and walks out. **MICHAEL** *hangs up and walks off as* **STUART** *trots into a different area with a map and dialling his cell phone.* **KAREN** *enters in still another area with a rolling suitcase, answering her cell.)*

KAREN. Hello, this is Karen.

STUART. Karen! Hey, it's Stuart. Can you hear me?

KAREN. Stuart! How are you? Where are you?

STUART. I'm sort of in Kyrgyzstan.

KAREN. Wow. The reception sounds pretty good there.

STUART. I drove back into Bishkek to call you. I'm supposed to be in the countryside to test our range there today and tomorrow.

KAREN. That's so cool.

STUART. Yeah. Yeah, it is. I just wish I liked goat wool better. Where are you?

KAREN. Airport to Santa Fe. There's a Hometown Buffet there that's getting a four on its customer evaluations – I'm going in to monitor for three days.

STUART. Well, ah, a little goat tells me you've got some other news!

KAREN. Oh my god, who told you? I just told my dad and you're hearing it in Kazakhstan?

STUART. Kyrgyzstan. It's a bit closer. You know. Michael Dexter told me. He's pretty much my best phone-buddy now – we test reception, shoot the breeze, he tells me when one of my best friends suddenly gets engaged. You know. So congratulations.

KAREN. Thank you, Stuart. Thank you so much.

STUART. So is this someone in the Hometown Buffet family? A nice president in charge of pork loins or something?

KAREN. Starbucks. He's a Starbucks scout.

STUART. Oh good lord.

KAREN. Is that bad?

STUART. No! I mean it could be worse. He could work for the death squads in Sudan.

KAREN. Well, you're not working for a mom-and-pop yourself, Mr. Verizon.

STUART. That's true. I just have this nagging fear everytime I leave my apartment that when I get back there'll be a new Starbucks in my kitchen.

KAREN. I'm glad you called.

STUART. Well, I had to find out if I'd heard right or if it was a static burst that sounded like "wedding." But you're getting married! Karen Baedeker is getting married!

KAREN. I think it's really happening. I just spoke to Max – he's calling my father now – he got tied up in a conference call earlier – he's really old-fashioned –

STUART. That's great. Sort of like me.

KAREN. Exactly. He's funny, self-deprecating –

STUART. Sounds like someone we know!

KAREN. He goes all over the world, he's just fascinated with local customs and people –

STUART. Bing Bing! Three for three!

KAREN. We're just such a great great fit.

STUART. And he had the nerve to pop the question! Three cheers for him! Hip Hip –

KAREN & STUART. – Hooray!

KAREN. We're e-mailing invitations ASAP. Not that many, we both want a small wedding, but you'll be first on the list –

STUART. Maybe I could be the Maid of Honor or something.

KAREN. You should go ahead and get the date in your Palm –

STUART. *(gets out his PDA)* I can do up to 200 years in advance – when are you thinking?

KAREN. Fifteen days from today.

STUART. Oh dear god.

KAREN. We wanted to give everyone two weeks to get the best ticket prices – can you make it – I know it's short notice –

STUART. That's certainly one phrase that leaps to mind –

KAREN. It's okay, isn't it? I want to get married at home and he's got an appointment only 150 miles away that day – he can drive up –

STUART. Karen, I really think – I mean far be it from me to actually impose an opinion on anyone, but I don't think this is a good idea –

KAREN. What? You're breaking up.

STUART. Stupid Kyrgyzstan!

(moving several steps away)

Can you hear me now?

KAREN. What? Stuart, are you still there?

STUART. *(hopping from spot to spot)* Karen, listen – okay, because, ever since that first day in college, that first Lit class where you spilled coffee on my book –

KAREN. Stuart?

STUART. Can you hear me? Karen, I've never told you this – but –

KAREN. *(yelling into phone)* I'll call you later, Stuart!

(She hangs up and **STUART** *slams shut his own phone.)*

STUART. *(yelling to Heaven)* DAMN YOU, KYRGYZSTAN!

(Lights shift – **STUART** *flees as* **KAREN** *hits a button on her phone and* **WALLY** *walks on stringing his long phone cord behind him.)*

WALLY. Karen, honey.

KAREN. Hi, Dad.

WALLY. Well, I talked to your beaux, I think he was in Toronto. He asked for your hand.

KAREN. …And?

WALLY. Well, there's a way of talking, you know? The way some people can just put the talking and the spaces between the talking together – especially on a phone – that just make you feel…like they hear you. Like they like hearing you. Your Uncle Hank did that. It's like a good solid handshake and a look in the eye, except through a tiny little wire a hundred miles away, you know.

KAREN. …and?

WALLY. Your Max has a good handshake.

KAREN. Thank you.

*(***KAREN** *and* **WALLY** *exit in opposite directions as* **LIZZIE** *and* **FRANCINE** *come on in chairs, holding laptops, talking on their phones.)*

FRANCINE. Thank you, Lizzie.

LIZZIE. Oh, hey, no prob.

FRANCINE. I don't think Karen's malicious. I just don't think she thinks! She's such a grasshopper, always leaving it up to us ants to think further ahead than tonight –

LIZZIE. I've always been partial to dung beetles – working and working to take a load of poop and roll it into a tidy ball and roll it home to play with –

FRANCINE. They don't play with the poop, Lizzie. They eat it.

(beat)

LIZZIE. What?

FRANCINE. They digest it over several days. It's not a toy.

LIZZIE. Eww.

FRANCINE. Yeah.

LIZZIE. Then I don't like that bug much at all. I mean I'm sure it's okay for them, but for me, that's just kind of unpleasant –

FRANCINE. But the point is, at least she has you and me to take care of her – and as far as you can tell –

LIZZIE. There are no red flags on her Max Aphelion. Though there's a Max Aphelion on the city council in Wapakaneta who keeps introducing measures to outlaw children on public property. He seems unpopular.

FRANCINE. I may keep digging around.

LIZZIE. It's kind of a race against the clock, isn't it? You only have two weeks to run a security clearance –

FRANCINE. Twelve days.

LIZZIE. What?

FRANCINE. We only have twelve days left until the wedding. Another typical Karen move.

LIZZIE. Well, if I were her I'd want to have the wedding when the groom was in town too.

FRANCINE. And this is the only time in the next year? He can't take vacation days?

LIZZIE. Maybe he hasn't accrued enough.

FRANCINE. Why are you making excuses for this mistake?

LIZZIE. Why are you so hostile to this mistake?

FRANCINE. I'm not hostile! I'm worried! I'm careful! I'm full of care!

LIZZIE. Well, do you want to relay my private eye work to Michael or should I?

FRANCINE. Why?

LIZZIE. He asked me to call him with what I found out.

FRANCINE. No, I'll call him later. When we're back at our hotels.

LIZZIE. Where are you?

FRANCINE. I'm in Sacramento testing groups on different mayoral candidates and slogans.

LIZZIE. Excellent! Anything good?

FRANCINE. We're getting big reactions to "Re-Elect Dan Schultz: Ending Corruption is the Least of His Talents."

LIZZIE. You're amazing!

FRANCINE. If something's worth doing, it's worth doing right, you know?

LIZZIE. You are like, the most diligent person I know.

FRANCINE. Thank you.

(Her phone buzzes.)

Hang on.

*(***KAREN** *scoots on in a rolling chair, opening her laptop, talking on her cell.)*

Karen?

KAREN. Hi, Francine! Sorry I'm late.

FRANCINE. I've got Lizzie on the other line. Hold on.

(pushes a button on her phone)

Can we all hear each other?

LIZZIE. Hi, Karie!

KAREN. Hi, Lizzie, thank you so much – both of you – for doing this. I woke up this morning thinking this is the kind of thing a mother is supposed to do – but you know…I just…I really –

LIZZIE. I consider it a deep honor and privilege to be your mother this afternoon, Karie.

KAREN. Thank you.

(looks at her PDA)

Oh my gosh. I just got a text from Max!

LIZZIE. What's it say?

KAREN. He's in a warm bath…it's a list of where he wants to kiss me…left shoulder…line of the neck…

LIZZIE. He works his way down?

KAREN. …oh yes.

LIZZIE. I'm getting all wiggly!

KAREN. There is nothing hotter than a hot text –

*(***LIZZIE** *is now panting happily,* **KAREN** *laughs.)*

We do this to each other like every other day – the best was when I was in a crowded elevator in Salt Lake City –

FRANCINE. Excuse me. Can we please just do this?

KAREN. Okay. Right. Sorry. I'm sorry.

LIZZIE. Can you forward me that message? I could use it tonight.

FRANCINE. What site should we be on, Karen?

KAREN. I'm thinking "DreamDresses.com"

*(***LIZZIE** *and* **FRANCINE** *type.)*

LIZZIE. Oooo.

FRANCINE. Mm.

KAREN. They can ship in five-to-seven business days and if you order $2,000 or more, they include a dozen roses free of charge.

LIZZIE. That is so cool.

FRANCINE. For 5,000 do they include a divorce attorney?

KAREN. No, but they do pre-nuptials on their sister site "Impermanence.com"

LIZZIE. But you're not doing pre-nups are you?

KAREN. Do you think I should?

FRANCINE. So what dresses are we looking at?

KAREN. On the left hand side, click on "Sexy/Sassy"

FRANCINE. Done.

LIZZIE. Wow.

KAREN. Is it "wow"?

LIZZIE. Oh, Karen!

KAREN. I'm looking at "Shoulder Exposé" or "The Jaw Dropper."

LIZZIE. They're gorgeous!

FRANCINE. They're very nice…

LIZZIE. They're fun! They say "I'm getting married and I'm going to have sex very very soon!"

FRANCINE. Did you look at the "Sunshine Smile" – it's still fun but it says "I'm going to wait until I leave the church to have sex."

KAREN. I like that, too.

LIZZIE. I haven't seen you in a while, Karen, how big are your breasts?

KAREN. What?

LIZZIE. The "Daring Dive" looks nice, but it draws attention to places I don't know if you want to draw attention –

FRANCINE. You don't exactly have time to send it back if it's not good on you –

KAREN. No, but click on the "Bride to Be" bar and type "Karen 3340"

*(***FRANCINE** *and* **LIZZIE** *type. Pause.)*

FRANCINE & LIZZIE. Oh my god!

FRANCINE. How did they get your head on the dress?

KAREN. I sent them a JPEG of my face and measurements – they attach it to any dress you click on now.

LIZZIE. There you are in "Mistress Midnight"! And "Silk Surrender"! And –

FRANCINE. You look great, Karen. Did you touch up this photo at all?

KAREN. No!

LIZZIE. Is there a place where I can do this with cars? I want to see my head in different cars to see how I like them –

FRANCINE. Karen, have you checked the "Classy Classics" section?

KAREN. I did –

FRANCINE. I'm always partial to more conservative dresses –

KAREN. I don't know, I wanted something fun.

FRANCINE. "Meadow Blossom" is nice – it diminishes your hips.

KAREN. Do you think so?

FRANCINE. "Classic 50's."…"Classic 40's" – these are nice…

KAREN. That's true…

FRANCINE. "Classic 30's" is close to what I wore on my wedding.

KAREN. I know.

FRANCINE. I think that's really lovely. All the guests thought so – I got more notes and e-mails for months afterward – 98% positive –

KAREN. But your figure is better than mine –

FRANCINE. You have a lovely figure.

KAREN. No, I don't –

FRANCINE. You do.

KAREN. It's not as perfect as yours –

FRANCINE. Lizzie, doesn't Karen have a completely fine figure?

LIZZIE. I made a hundred Karens in a hundred dresses! You could marry the entire Green Bay Packers!

FRANCINE. What I don't see are prices.

KAREN. They're totally reasonable –

FRANCINE. How do I get to prices?

KAREN. Let's just look at styles right now –

FRANCINE. I just want to know –

LIZZIE. You have to click on the hemline.

FRANCINE. *(clicks)* …oh.

KAREN. Francine –

FRANCINE. This dress is $4,000.

KAREN. Which is kind of steep compared with some of the others –

FRANCINE. I can't let you spend $4,000 on a dress.

KAREN. It's my credit card, Francine, you can't –

FRANCINE. Okay, look, I checked around a bit myself this morning and I found some really lovely dresses at "SensibleBride.com" and "RealisticExpectations.net" –

KAREN. I don't want Realistic, I want Dream Dresses! This is my wedding, Francine!

FRANCINE. And on your salary –

KAREN. How much was your dress?

FRANCINE. That's completely beside the point –

KAREN. Your's was like $3,000 or something, wasn't it?

FRANCINE. Thirty-three-hundred, but that was my wedding –

KAREN. So?

FRANCINE. That was a real wedding, Karen, a serious wedding.

(beat)

KAREN. What did you just say?

FRANCINE. There are different kinds of weddings, that's all, there are weddings you plan for 18 months and weddings you throw together in two weeks.

KAREN. I am not –

FRANCINE. You pay $4,000 for a dress for a grown-up wedding, Karen, not for a kid's make-believe.

KAREN. This is not make-believe –

FRANCINE. I'm sorry, this is some guy no one ever met, you've barely met – some internet ghost you've known for a few weeks and you're in "love" –

KAREN. And how did you meet Michael?

FRANCINE. Excuse me?

KAREN. Did you meet Michael face to face?

FRANCINE. Eventually. Yes.

KAREN. "Mate-a-Rama.com," Francine? You guys wrote back and forth for what, a year?

FRANCINE. Eight months.

KAREN. Because you had to get him to fall in love with who you pretended you were until he was in so deep that when he did meet you he couldn't run screaming like

every other man you'd ever dated for more than a week –

FRANCINE. We were establishing a bond, laying a solid foundation for love –

KAREN. You knew once he met you, you'd have to get a ring out of him in the first few minutes or he'd be out of there –

FRANCINE. How dare you??

KAREN. Of course you're jealous of me! I found a guy who fell in love with me the first time he met me – actually *met* me, no preamble, no written seduction – standing at the continental breakfast buffet at the Sheraton – I finally did something better than you and you can't stand it!!

FRANCINE. Is there even a "Max Aphelion," Karen? Or is this your mid-life fever imagination just conjuring him up? One last pathetic attempt to play grown-up and sit at the big table – at least everyone's met my husband, talked to him, touched him! You want to play your sad little games you can do it without me!

(She slams her phone shut and storms off.)

(Long pause. **LIZZIE** *and* **KAREN** *sit there on their phones…)*

LIZZIE. …I found a nice dress for only $975.

*(***KAREN** *hangs up and wheels off.* **LIZZIE** *sits a moment…)*

…Karen?

(Her laptop beeps. She pushes a button as **MICHAEL** *wheels on typing on his computer – we hear what he and* **LIZZIE** *type as a Voice-Over as they work silently.)*

MICHAEL. *(V.O.)* Lizzie. Just thought I'd see if you have any dirt on Mr. Mystery.

LIZZIE. *(V.O.) (typing)* I'm online now. Just off the phone shopping with Karen and Francine.

MICHAEL. *(V.O.)* How'd that go?

LIZZIE. *(V.O.)* You ever see photos of Hiroshima?

MICHAEL. *(V.O.)* Ouch.

LIZZIE. *(V.O.)* Where are you?

MICHAEL. *(V.O.)* Outside of Topeka. Staying off the phone so Francine can call. Thought I'd say "hi."

LIZZIE. *(V.O.)* Hi.

MICHAEL. *(V.O.)* I was pitching our package to this hotel chain and they walked me through their new wing and in this one room they were building a T.V. case and entertainment cabinet thing – so of course I thought of you.

LIZZIE. *(V.O.)* I remind you of an entertainment cabinet?

MICHAEL. *(V.O.)* When you were trying to build one in college. In your living room. And you called me over that night.

LIZZIE. *(V.O.)* Ah.

MICHAEL. *(V.O.)* It was so primal. You were laying on the rug in that sweatshirt and cut-offs and looked up when I walked in and just smiled –

LIZZIE. *(V.O.)* My hero.

MICHAEL. *(V.O.)* To kneel beside you on the floor – the only light from the streetlights outside –

LIZZIE. *(V.O.)* I like starting after the world is asleep.

MICHAEL. *(V.O.)* Acting totally on instinct, to find the right tool – I remember the Phillips caught the light –

LIZZIE. *(V.O.)* I remember guiding your hand –

MICHAEL. *(V.O.)* And pressing it into the screw you already had half-in –

LIZZIE & MICHAEL. *(V.O.)* – and turning…

MICHAEL. *(V.O.)* That gentle pressure, pushing, pushing, pushing –

LIZZIE. *(V.O.)* …til it was in tight.

MICHAEL. *(V.O.)* And then again and again….

LIZZIE. *(V.O.)* …and again and again…

MICHAEL. *(V.O.)* Working our way up the cabinet…

LIZZIE. *(V.O.)* …inch by inch…

MICHAEL. *(V.O.)* …holding the shelves as we went…

LIZZIE. *(V.O.)* One plunge at a time…

MICHAEL. *(V.O.)* …til everything was flushed and arched –

LIZZIE. *(V.O.)* Looking for another opening, the next move –

MICHAEL. *(V.O.)* Fitting piece after piece after piece –

LIZZIE. *(V.O.)* Shoving against the wall for support –

MICHAEL. *(V.O.)* Breathing together –

LIZZIE. *(V.O.)* Whispering in the dark –

MICHAEL. *(V.O.)* Oh god –

LIZZIE. *(V.O.)* Oh god –

*(***MICHAEL***'s phone rings.)*

MICHAEL. *(out loud)* Oh god!

(He fumbles the phone to his ear, clicks it on –)

LIZZIE. *(V.O.) (typing)* Michael?

*(***FRANCINE** *enters on her phone with a clipboard.)*

FRANCINE. Michael!

MICHAEL. What?!

FRANCINE. Are you okay?

MICHAEL. Hey, Francine! I'm fine! Great! How are you??

FRANCINE. Have you been running? You sound out of breath?

MICHAEL. No, I'm just…in my hotel! Sitting here alone!

FRANCINE. …doing what?

LIZZIE. *(V.O.) (typing)* Michael, are you there?

MICHAEL. Running from the bathroom. I ran to the phone. What's up, babe?

FRANCINE. Nothing.

MICHAEL. You don't sound like "nothing."

LIZZIE. *(V.O.) (typing)* Michael, should I keep waiting or start checking other e-mails?

FRANCINE. It's nothing! I'm just on my way into the group and I was just trying to help Karen and she turned on me like a wolverine and now I'm not even going to the stupid wedding if there's even going to be a stupid wed-

ding and I don't even care except that I do and I want her to be happy and I hate her and I am so so lucky to have you in my life and how unfair is it that Karen can't find a perfect match and I love you and I really love you and I had to call and say it and I miss you a lot a lot a lot right now and I had to call…that's all.

MICHAEL. That's not nothing.

LIZZIE. *(V.O.) (typing)* Michael, I'm going. It's been lovely reminiscing with you. Peace.

(She rolls out.)

MICHAEL. *(V.O.) (typing)* …Wait!

FRANCINE. And now I have to go test Mayoral slogans on a bunch of voters, I love you, bye!

(She walks out.)

MICHAEL. *(into phone)* Wait!

(He's alone.)

…Can't anybody just wait?

(Lights shift as he wheels out and **KAREN** *and* **WALLY** *sit on his couch staring at his unseen T.V., sounds of commercials play quietly.* **KAREN** *dejectedly eats from a half-gallon of ice cream. Pause. They stare.)*

KAREN. *(blankly)* You can speed through the commercials, you know.

WALLY. I don't mind waiting. I figure they spent months of their lives and thousands of their dollars to tell me about their stuff, I can give 'em thirty seconds.

KAREN. You are the perfect T.V. watcher, Dad.

WALLY. *(shrugs)* I do my bit.

(Pause. More commercial sounds.)

So you want to talk about it yet?

(She holds up the ice cream in answer and keeps eating, staring.)

Okey-dokey.

(Pause. They watch.)

Cause you know I think you got a lovely figure, but I remember your mother was terrified one peanut butter cookie and her wedding dress was kaput, and I can't help noticing you're packin' away that gallon –

KAREN. There's no dress for me to fit into, Dad.

WALLY. Oh honey, I'm sure there must be one that fits you –

KAREN. There's thousands that fit me. I'm just not buying them.

WALLY. Ah. You're leasing?

KAREN. I'm not leasing, Dad!

WALLY. Well, help me out here! You come to my house and wanta play twenty questions – I'm no good at this. I'm an idiot, sweetheart. You gotta lay it right out for me.

KAREN. I don't even think there's going to be a wedding.

WALLY. Okay. That's good and clear. Thank you.

(Beat. Realization.)

There's not going to be any wedding??

KAREN. Will you please mute the T.V.?

WALLY. *(fumbling with the remote, muting the T.V.)* Did he back out? Is he already married? I can't believe it – he had such a good phone handshake!

KAREN. He's not married –

WALLY. Well, he sounded fine, but you can't actually see his eyes, you know, you can't tell – like some of those love songs on the radio, you can't tell if they're singing to a girl or a Border Collie, you know –

KAREN. Max doesn't even know about it. I'm the one backing out.

WALLY. So it's your choice?

KAREN. *(nods)* And it's probably a mistake. Like saying "yes" in the first place was probably a mistake. Like every choice I make is a mistake. Like my life has been a mistake –

WALLY. Whoa, whoa, whoa.

(takes the ice cream)

I'm doin' an intervention here. Nobody's whole *life* is a mistake. Not even your uncle Lloyd, and my god in

heaven, did that man make some doozies. You remember those geese? You remember that machete school?

KAREN. Dad –

WALLY. I'm just saying I've known you since your first hour on earth, sweetheart, and you have yet to scale the true heights of whoppers.

KAREN. Okay. But the wedding –

WALLY. How do you know it's a mistake?

(beat)

KAREN. …Francine told me.

WALLY. Oh, now! That's – That is – we're talking Francine, Karen!

KAREN. But she's right!

WALLY. Well, she's a great girl, but –

KAREN. – and Stuart too and common sense and everything says I'm screwing up again –

WALLY. I'm gonna call her. I'm gonna call her and we'll get to the bottom of this –

KAREN. Dad, don't –

WALLY. I am not having my little girl screw up my other little girl's big day!

(He gestures to the T.V. as he fumbles with his land line phone and address book.)

Will you push the pause? Or stop or whatever – this could take a while –

*(***KAREN** *picks up the remote and pushes a button as her cell rings.)*

KAREN. *(into phone)* Hello?

(Lights up on **LIZZIE** *at her computer, on the phone.)*

LIZZIE. Hi, Karen, it's Lizzie. How are you, pumpkin?

KAREN. I've been better.

LIZZIE. I know. It's so tough when your own sister accuses you of being a delusional liar. I mean, speaking from my own experience. Except it wasn't my sister, it was my first three boyfriends. And my shrink.

KAREN. Lizzie –

LIZZIE. – and the UPS guy. But I think he just hated life.

KAREN. But Francine's right, I don't know if I should go through with this –

LIZZIE. Has Max given you a ring yet?

KAREN. What?

LIZZIE. An engagement ring. You don't have to go through with it until you accept his engagement ring. Everyone knows that.

KAREN. I didn't know that –

LIZZIE. Oops, I've got another call – can you hang on? Just hang on one itty bitty sec –

(pushes button)

Hello?

*(***MICHAEL** *appears in a different area with his rolling suitcase, talking on his cell.)*

MICHAEL. Lizzie, it's Michael – I have to talk to you.

LIZZIE. Oh poop.

MICHAEL. What?

WALLY. *(holding up his address book)* I got seventeen numbers for Francine – any idea which I should call?

*(***KAREN** *looks.)*

LIZZIE. I want to talk to you, but Karen's on the other line – I think she's kind of on a cliff.

MICHAEL. What??

LIZZIE. A metaphorical cliff. I think.

MICHAEL. I just want to tell you – our I-M this afternoon –

LIZZIE. It was nice.

MICHAEL. It's just – I haven't felt that way in a while –

LIZZIE. Cool. I need to check with Karen. Hang on.

(pushes button)

Karen, are you still there?

KAREN. Of course. Where else am I going to go except further into my bucket of ice cream –

LIZZIE. Oh, sweet potato, you shouldn't do that, not so close to your honeymoon!

WALLY. *(to* **KAREN***)* Which one are you pointing to? This one or this one?

LIZZIE. Is that Mr. Fiancé I hear??

KAREN. It's my dad. I'm at my dad's –

(to **WALLY***)*

This is her new cell. Try that.

LIZZIE. While you're helping him, I need to check on something – hang on!

(pushes a button)

Hi, Michael. You were saying?

MICHAEL. Just that I hadn't thought about building that entertainment center in forever and it reminded me of other times – like when you planted that flower box –

LIZZIE. That *was* nice…

MICHAEL. With the marigolds.

LIZZIE. Just the smell of the soil and your hair –

MICHAEL. …shoot. I'm, ah, I'm –

(He pushes a button on his cell and **FRANCINE** *enters into still yet another area in a bathrobe on her cell phone.)*

Hello?

FRANCINE. Hi, Honey. Where are you?

MICHAEL. I'm…in the airport. Hi, Francine.

LIZZIE. *(pushes a button)* Hi, Karie, I'm back.

FRANCINE & KAREN. You sound funny. Are you okay?

LIZZIE. I'm scrumptious.

MICHAEL. I'm good. What's up?

WALLY. *(to* **KAREN***)* It's ringing.

FRANCINE. I've already taken my Xanax and I'm still clawing, I need to talk to someone – Shoot. Hang on.

(pushes a button)

Hello?

WALLY. Francine, it's me. Your father.

FRANCINE. Oh my god! Dad! Are you okay?

WALLY. What? I'm fine –

FRANCINE. Oh thank god. Then why are you calling me?

MICHAEL. *(pushes a button, whispered)* Lizzie? Lizzie, are you there?

LIZZIE. *(to* **KAREN***)* Listen, why don't you check on your dad, I'll be right back –

(pushes a button)

So you were saying about the soil?

FRANCINE. Did the hemorrhoids check out okay?

WALLY. They're fine, listen –

FRANCINE. Did you get that new container I sent?

WALLY. What container?

FRANCINE. For your blood pressure pills. It talks to you.

WALLY. I haven't put the batteries in yet.

MICHAEL. *(to* **LIZZIE***)* I'm kind of in an airport – I can't go into the soil too much here.

LIZZIE. Why not? We're just talking about planting seeds in a garden –

MICHAEL. I need to get back – I have another call – hang on –

FRANCINE. Hang on, Dad –

FRANCINE, MICHAEL, LIZZIE. Hey, Michael/Francine/Karen?

FRANCINE, MICHAEL, KAREN. Who are you talking to?

MICHAEL & LIZZIE. No one!

FRANCINE. My dad –

WALLY. She put me on hold.

FRANCINE. He can't even put his own batteries in his own pill dispenser.

MICHAEL. Do you need to talk to him, 'cause I can hang up –

FRANCINE. I want to talk to you – I need to hear your voice.

WALLY. Next thing she'll be asking me to e-mail her!

MICHAEL & LIZZIE. What should we talk about?

KAREN. Shoot, hang on.

(pushes button)

Hello?

(And **STUART** *stumbles out into still yet another area, drunk, on his cell.)*

STUART. Karen, it's Stuart, we gotta talk.

KAREN. Oh god. Where are you?

STUART. I'm in Uganda, Karen! It's beautiful!

KAREN. That's great, I've got another call, can you hang on?

STUART. Story of my life, hang on for someone else's call…

KAREN. Have you been drinking?

STUART. Only since Tuesday.

LIZZIE. *(pushes button)* Michael, are you there?

FRANCINE. *(to* **MICHAEL***)* When are we both due back home?

MICHAEL. I'll check my Palm Pilot – hang on –

(pushes button, whispers)

Lizzie?

LIZZIE. Why are you whispering?

MICHAEL. *(punching his PDA, whispering)* I'm not whispering.

LIZZIE. Then I'm losing you.

WALLY. I think I lost her. I'm hangin' up.

KAREN. *(to* **WALLY***)* Don't hang up.

STUART. *(to* **KAREN***)* I'm not goin' anywhere 'til I've said what I have to say.

KAREN. I'm talking to my dad.

FRANCINE. *(pushes button)* Dad? Sorry to keep you waiting. Are you okay?

WALLY. Will you quit asking me if I'm okay?

WALLY, STUART, MICHAEL. I gotta tell you something.

FRANCINE, KAREN, LIZZIE. Actually can you hang on?

(They all push their buttons.)

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