

CHRISTMAS COOKIES

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At rise: a large living room in a nice suburb. The space is decorated for Christmas, the decorations nearing the point of excess. This is a house kept by a woman with too much time on her hands. A makeshift bar is set up in the room. MICHELLE moves about, arranging things, setting table decorations, turning lamps on or off, the last minute fuss before guests arrive. SHEILA does the same, but only to appease MICHELLE. Eventually, SHEILA gives up and sits.

SHEILA

Michelle? Everything's done.

MICHELLE

I feel like I'm forgetting something. I'm sick to my stomach.

SHEILA

You always feel like that before a party.

MICHELLE

I do?

SHEILA

Yes. Everyone does.

MICHELLE

They do?

SHEILA

Yes.

MICHELLE

(pause) There's no ice in the bucket!

SHEILA

I'll get it. *(exits)*

MICHELLE

This is my home. This is my party. *(a significant breath)* This is **my** home.

MICHELLE deliberately knocks a wine glass over as SHEILA re-enters with filled ice bucket.

Didn't break!

SHEILA

Good. Are those new? When did you get them?

MICHELLE

I don't know.

SHEILA

What?

MICHELLE

They were in the cabinet.

SHEILA

Who put them there?

MICHELLE

Ken must have.

SHEILA

Ken bought glasses?

MICHELLE

I know, right? Maybe they were a Christmas gift from a client.

SHEILA

That seems likely.

MICHELLE

It does?

SHEILA

Yes.

MICHELLE

Good.

SHEILA

(after a pause) Do you want a drink?

MICHELLE

I think I do.

SHEILA

Sometimes it helps to have one before your guests arrive.

MICHELLE

I just feel so nervous.

SHEILA

You have to relax, but don't try to relax, then you'll just worry about how much you're not relaxing. Just sit down and have a drink with me. Repeat after me—People love my parties and tonight's will be another great success.

MICHELLE

(laughing) People love my parties and tonight's will be another great success. *(pause)*
Thank you.

SHEILA

It's silly to be so stressed—not that many people are coming, right?

MICHELLE

Ten or so, I think. It's going to be under-attended this year. I can't help that, Sheila. Some people had weddings. Do you believe that? Who gets married this close to Christmas?

SHEILA

They probably got a deal on the hall. It is a Friday.

MICHELLE

Probably. *(Pause)* I'm going to say something.

SHEILA

Okay. Did you just say you're going to say something because you're scared to say the thing and now that you've said that, you're locked into saying the real thing?

MICHELLE

Yes I did.

SHEILA

I thought so.

MICHELLE

I am secretly afraid that people lied about having other things to go to.

SHEILA

You are?

MICHELLE

Yes. I am secretly afraid that people aren't coming because they heard that Ken and I are having problems and they don't want to be in a tension-filled environment.

SHEILA

You think that the women of St. Pat's Church lied about having other events to attend because they don't want to exchange cookies in a house of marital discord?

MICHELLE

Yes.

SHEILA

Oh.

MICHELLE

They are nervous about how to behave around me. They would rather not see me socially or be in my home.

SHEILA

Hmmm. *(Taking cell phone from purse)* Who's supposedly at a wedding?

MICHELLE

Marci Dominick and Jeannie McCain.

SHEILA

(turns on phone, scrolls through address book, pushes buttons and talks into phone) Oh, hi. Is Marci there? Is this Caitlin? Hi, honey, it's Mrs. Morton. *(Pause)* Can you tell me what dress she was wearing? Because we have the same dress and I don't want to wear the same thing as her. Fantastic. You know what? You don't even need to tell her I called. I'm going to see her in just a little while. Bye-bye. *(She hangs up)* They left already, for the Palmer House, and she was wearing a silver skirt and a sparkly blue tank top.

MICHELLE

Oh, I know that outfit.

SHEILA

She wears it every time she goes out.

MICHELLE

It doesn't flatter her.

SHEILA

No it does not. But she was definitely going to a wedding.

MICHELLE

Thank you.

SHEILA

No one is going to skip this because Ken is having an affair.

MICHELLE

Don't say that! No one knows that! Do you want me to throw up? I'll throw up if you say that again.

SHEILA

Oh right. No one is going to skip this because you and Ken are (*air quotes*) "fighting."

MICHELLE

Okay. I don't even know if he's . . . if he's doing that other thing.

SHEILA

Okay.

MICHELLE

I don't! There have been a few things that didn't add up.

SHEILA

Like the earring in his car.

MICHELLE

Shhh. Don't talk about that. Don't make it more true by talking about it. (*Pause*) It was probably stupid of me to even mention it to you. Now you have a bad impression of Ken.

SHEILA

And I had such a stellar impression of him before.

MICHELLE

Don't do that.

SHEILA

What?

MICHELLE

Don't not like Ken.

SHEILA

Why?

MICHELLE

It makes it harder for me when you don't like him.

SHEILA

I've never liked him. I can't start now.

MICHELLE

Yes you can. You liked him when we first got married.

SHEILA

For a few months.

MICHELLE

Yes. You liked him then.

SHEILA

I liked him then because then, he liked you. *(Pause)* Did you make the amaretto apricot cookies?

MICHELLE

I make them every year.

SHEILA

Did you make the little round ones with the chocolate inside?

MICHELLE

Yes. I make them every year, Sheila. People might be sick of my cookies.

SHEILA

No.

MICHELLE

You can have too much of a good thing.

SHEILA

You make them once a year.

MICHELLE

I know. But years seem shorter as we get older. *(Pause, then whining)* Why aren't people coming to my party?

SHEILA

Because every so often, people have other things to do. *(Pause)* Refill?

MICHELLE

Okay. *(Rises, goes to where the bar is set up and refills glasses of wine, returns, hands one to SHEILA)* Cheers. *(Clink)* Merry Christmas.

SHEILA

And a happy New Year. *(Drink)* When is Ken getting home?

MICHELLE

Monday morning.

SHEILA

Does he usually spend the weekend on business trips?

MICHELLE

No.

SHEILA

Hmmm.

MICHELLE

What? Do you think he's misbehaving in New Orleans, too?

SHEILA

Misbehaving? He's not a three year old, Michelle. He's a grown man who's responsible for his choices.

MICHELLE

I know that! But why would he spend the weekend there and then come back on Monday morning? Why wouldn't he just finish his business on Friday and come home?

SHEILA

I don't know.

MICHELLE

But on the calendar on the fridge he wrote "Ohare, 7:30 am" on Monday.

SHEILA

I don't know, Michelle.

MICHELLE

I'm sick. I can't have this party.

SHEILA

Stop it. You have it every year and you're going to have it now. *(no response)* Maybe there's a dinner on the weekend that Ken has to stay for.

MICHELLE

Yes! That's probably it. Some kind of function. Like this wedding everybody is going to . . .

SHEILA

Two people are going to it.

MICHELLE

Right. And this cookie exchange. That's a Friday night event.

SHEILA

Right. But I hardly think Ken's going to a cookie exchange five states away.

MICHELLE

I'm just saying.

SHEILA

I don't even think they have cookie exchanges in the South. It might just be a Chicago thing, like 16-inch softball and saying "pop" instead of "soda."

MICHELLE

But there are events on Friday nights—all over the country.

SHEILA

Indeed there are.

MICHELLE

It's actually better that he's not here. If I'm worried about tension driving people away.

SHEILA

True.

(Doorbell ring)

MICHELLE

Party time!

SHEILA

Let the festivities begin.

(MICHELLE opens the door to FRAN, a woman of about 35. She is wearing a police officer's uniform and carrying an extremely large, apparently heavy box, presumably filled with cookies.)

MICHELLE

Hi, Fran! Thanks for coming.

FRAN

Am I the first one here?

MICHELLE

Someone has to be first! But actually, Sheila is here already.

FRAN

Oh, hi Sheila.

SHEILA

Hi, Fran.

MICHELLE

Let me take those from you. *(She takes heavy box of cookies from FRAN and places them on table)* Boy! These feel . . . dense.

FRAN

I know. I don't think they turned out the way they were supposed to. I followed the recipe, but . . . I don't know. I'm not so good in the kitchen.

MICHELLE

I'm sure they'll be . . . okay. Are you working?

FRAN

Oh, not right now. I'd have a hard time explaining to the chief what I was doing stopping at a cookie exchange while I was on the clock.

SHEILA

I'll bet!

FRAN

But I do have to go in shortly. I wanted to get here right on time, since I have to leave early. Sorry, Michelle. I hate to be a bad guest.

MICHELLE

(through her teeth) I can appreciate that, Fran. After all, we have you to thank for keeping our streets safe.

SHEILA

I didn't realize you were a full-fledged officer, Fran.

FRAN

I don't think I've seen you since I became one. *(Pause)* After Jimmy and I split, I had to do some thinking about what I was going to do. You know, I had been working in his dad's restaurant. Once the divorce got started, they didn't want me around there anymore.

MICHELLE

That's awful.

FRAN

You know, at the time it seemed like it was. But the truth is, I never wanted to be a hostess anyway. Once I got out of there, I felt like there were just a million options opening up to me.

SHEILA

And you chose police work?

FRAN

Well, you know my dad was a cop. He didn't have any sons, so he always regretted that no one followed him into the force.

SHEILA

He must be really proud of you now.

FRAN

He's dead.

SHEILA

Oh.

FRAN

(emotional) Can I use your bathroom, Michelle?

MICHELLE

Of course. You know where it is— right down that hall, second door on the left. *(FRAN is long gone. MICHELLE turns to SHEILA)* I have one guest and you make her cry? Fantastic!

SHEILA

Oh my God! How was I supposed to know her dad was dead?

MICHELLE

Because he got shot when we were in high school! You went to the funeral!

SHEILA

I have no recollection of that.

MICHELLE

You went with me. Your mom drove us.

SHEILA

No recollection.

MICHELLE

You wore a gray miniskirt and a blue and gray striped top.

SHEILA

I remember the outfit. *(pause)* I wasn't that good of friends with her. I probably just went to get out of school.

MICHELLE

So to recap: My husband is spending the weekend 1200 miles away, and my only guest is crying. A banner night for old Michelle.

SHEILA

I'm a guest.

MICHELLE

Hardly.

SHEILA

Maybe she shouldn't talk about her dad like he's alive! It confuses people.

MICHELLE

It shouldn't confuse people who were at the funeral!

(FRAN returns)

SHEILA

I'm really sorry, Fran. You were speaking about your dad with so much spirit that I just . . .

FRAN

It's okay, Sheila. He's been gone more than 15 years and sometimes it still takes me by surprise.

SHEILA

Me too. Can I get you a drink?

FRAN

Oh, I can't drink before I go on duty.

SHEILA

Oh that's right. Duty calls!

(Doorbell rings. MICHELLE goes to answer it and lets in JUDY, a woman in mid-50s dressed conservatively, and TRISH, a woman in her late 20s dressed in nice jeans, heels and a sweater)

MICHELLE

Welcome, Judy! Thanks so much for coming! *(She takes the tray of cookies from JUDY and sets them on the table)* Sheila, would you mind taking coats? *(SHEILA takes coats from JUDY and TRISH, MICHELLE speaks to TRISH)* I'm Michelle.

TRISH

I'm Trish.

JUDY

Oh, I'm so sorry. Michelle, I hope you don't mind, but I brought my new neighbor, Trish. She and her husband just moved in down my street—

TRISH

He's my fiancé, actually. The wedding's this summer.

JUDY

What?

TRISH

We're not married yet.

JUDY

Oh my.

MICHELLE

A summer wedding, how nice! Welcome to my home, Trish. I'm really glad to meet you.

JUDY

Now where's your mother hiding?

MICHELLE

Oh, gosh, Judy. Didn't my mom talk to you today? She came down with the flu yesterday.

JUDY

But I saw her this morning pulling into the grocery store.

MICHELLE

You didn't talk to her, did you?

JUDY

No, we were both in our cars. I was leaving, she was just getting there.

MICHELLE

She's really under the weather. Maybe she was getting medicine.

JUDY

She beeped her horn at me, and waved like crazy.

MICHELLE

Maybe she was delirious.

JUDY

Oh heavens! Then she shouldn't be behind the wheel! It's too bad. I was hoping Trish would get to meet her. She's a character, that one.

MICHELLE

Oh, that she is, but it will have to be some other time, Trish.

JUDY

She's always got a story, your mom.

SHEILA

And a few of them are actually true.

TRISH

Judy's told me a lot about her. She seems like a real trip! Here are my cookies. I didn't really have time to bake. *(She hands MICHELLE a grocery store tray of brownies)*

MICHELLE

That is perfectly okay. *(it's not)* I know as well as the next girl how days can get away from you. *(takes box and puts it with the rest of the cookies)* You ladies feel free to help yourselves to drinks.

(JUDY and TRISH move to the bar. Momentarily, FRAN's holstered police radio begins to crackle)

FRAN

Excuse me. This thing is kind of annoying. I'll step outside.

MICHELLE

No problem, Fran.

(MICHELLE and SHEILA move away from JUDY and TRISH and speak privately)

MICHELLE

Okay, this might be the worst cookie exchange ever.

SHEILA

Will you please stop it? It's going to be fine. Three women are here already. Plus me. Four women are here!

MICHELLE

And one of them I didn't even invite.

SHEILA

You should be grateful to Judy for bringing her. She's pumping up your numbers.

MICHELLE

I should be grateful to have a guest who brings grocery cookies? What kind of woman doesn't bake for a cookie exchange? She might as well have given everyone a few bucks and we could go buy our own!

SHEILA

Listen to me. She's new in the neighborhood. Make her your friend. When things go south with Ken—

MICHELLE

Don't you make me sick.

SHEILA

--you should have your own friend base to fall back on.

MICHELLE

I have you.

SHEILA

I won't be enough.

MICHELLE

Okay.

SHEILA

While you're at it, stake your claim on officer Fran.

MICHELLE

She's been my friend since high school.

SHEILA

But I think you've slacked off on that over the last few years.

MICHELLE

I know. But she's divorced. It's weird to be around her.

SHEILA

(a look) At least she bakes her own cookies.

MICHELLE

I know. And they're horrible.

SHEILA

Why do you throw this stupid party if you hate everyone's cookies?

MICHELLE

It's not stupid. And I like some of the cookies. But hers are really bad. Last year, she used cumin instead of cocoa! They were gross.

SHEILA

Now that I do remember.

MICHELLE

Anyway, I'm not serving those cookies to these women. Especially the new one.

SHEILA

What do you propose doing?

MICHELLE

She's leaving soon, right? I'll just hide them after she leaves.

SHEILA

Don't upset her. She has a gun.

MICHELLE

Oh, I think she's been upset enough for one evening.

SHEILA

Let it go.

FRAN re-enters, followed by two women. MELISSA and BRIDGET are both in their early 30s, attractively dressed and clearly a team. These are the girls who, at the age of ten, promised to marry brothers, buy houses right next door to each other, have kids at the same time, and actually did it.

FRAN

Look who I found walking up the street.

MICHELLE

Hi there, ladies. Why on earth did you walk?

MELISSA

Because we live six houses away.

MICHELLE

I know that. But it's cold.

BRIDGET

And besides, the cookies needed to cool. We just finished them 15 minutes ago.

MICHELLE

You know you didn't have to bake if there was a time crunch. You could've come without cookies. Or grabbed some from the bakery.

(JUDY and TRISH approach the group)

MELISSA

Michelle, if I'd shown up at your house with store bought cookies, you would've thrown my ass right back down the street.

JUDY

Hello Bridget, Melissa. This is my new neighbor Trish.

TRISH

Bringer of store bought cookies.

MICHELLE

Which is perfectly fine.

MELISSA

Oh, by next year you'll learn. You put your best homemaking foot forward when you walk through Michelle's door.

BRIDGET

You know with little Martha pushing 75, perhaps our little Michelle can snatch that spot and rise to the top of the empire of good living!

MICHELLE

And maybe I just will. Let me take your cookies.

SHEILA

(filling a lull) Fran, was anything important on the police beat?

FRAN

Oh, no. A patrol car picked up a lost dog. Someone at the station recognized where it belonged and they brought it back to the house.

BRIDGET

Thrilling.

MELISSA

Action packed Glenmorning Bluff. Subdivision of intrigue and sensation.

BRIDGET

Way more interesting than Woodson Hollow.

MELISSA

Next thing you know, a streetlight might burn out.

JUDY

Now stop, you two. I am glad to live in a part of town where those are the only kinds of problems we have.

TRISH

Me too. On Saturday morning, our block is filled with kids in baseball hats running up and down the street. It's like Mayberry. My fiancé and I love it.

JUDY

They're getting married very soon. In the summer.

BRIDGET

That's Glenmorning Bluff, Trish.

MELISSA

Looks like Pleasantville. Sounds like a bottle of scotch. *(pause)* The name was a screw up anyway. The developer's parents were named Glen and Maureen, and he wanted to commemorate their lives in the naming of his biggest project.

BRIDGET

He told his little lackey, who was filling out all the forms, to put the name as "Glen Maureen Bluff."

MELISSA

But the kid heard it wrong, wrote down Glenmorning, the big shot never proofread it and didn't even know it was wrong until the sign was up. So he fired the kid.

TRISH

Why didn't he just have a new sign made?

BRIDGET

Because each sign cost over 18 grand.

MELISSA

He didn't love his parents that much.

(BRIDGET and MELISSA move together to the bar, out of range of the rest of the group, and get snacks, ie pretzels.)

FRAN

Sheila, is Bill working tonight?

SHEILA

Yes. He'll probably overlap your shift by a bit.

TRISH

Oh, is your husband a cop?

SHEILA

He's a detective.

FRAN

Which means he doesn't have to chase after lost dogs.

TRISH

What do you do, Sheila?

SHEILA

I work in schools.

TRISH

What grade do you teach?

SHEILA

I don't teach, actually. I run the book fairs that go from school to school.

TRISH

That sounds like fun.

SHEILA

It is. I like to be around the kids.

(BRIDGET and MELISSA have come back to the group)

BRIDGET

I hate everyone's kids except my own.

MELISSA

Me too. I like yours okay, Bridget.

BRIDGET

I like yours, too. Kind of.

TRISH

(to BRIDGET and MELISSA) What do you two do?

BRIDGET

We mostly sit together and bitch.

MELISSA

It usually involves drinking wine.

BRIDGET

(after a pause) Oh you meant for a living?

TRISH

Yes.

MELISSA

I used to be a pharmaceutical sales rep.

BRIDGET

And I used to be a third grade teacher. Til I figured out that I hated kids.

MELISSA

And now we're stay at home moms.

BRIDGET

But mostly we do that thing with the sitting and the bitching.

MELISSA

And the drinking.

BRIDGET

Yes, the drinking.

MICHELLE

Speaking of which, can I get anyone a fresh drink?

FRAN

Could I just have an ice water, Michelle?

MICHELLE

Of course.

MELISSA

Can you open another bottle of the—

BRIDGET

Cabernet?

MICHELLE

Of course. (*MICHELLE takes glasses from MELISSA and BRIDGET and moves to bar area.*)

JUDY

So it sure is nice to see everyone again. I so look forward to this event each year.

FRAN

Me too, Judy. There are a few people that come to Michelle's every year – and here is the only time I see them. It's a nice night to catch up.

MICHELLE

(*from bar*) That's sweet of you to say. Both of you.

JUDY

It's true. All though I do wish your mom was here.

TRISH

It's fun to have an event like this in your neighborhood that lets everyone touch base. Get into the holiday spirit and stuff.

BRIDGET

Yes. Stuff.

MELISSA

Stuff. Exactly.

FRAN

Who else are you expecting, Michelle?

MICHELLE

(*moving back from bar, passing out drinks*) Let me see. Jeannie and Marci aren't coming. Both of them had a wedding to go to.

JUDY

Oh, that's too bad.

MICHELLE

But I'm still expecting Mary Morgan, Diana McGrath, Katie Scholl, Terri Ward, Kristen Reedy and Deb Schulte.

BRIDGET

(*to MELISSA*) Didn't you call her?

MELISSA

Who? Deb Schulte?

BRIDGET

No. Michelle. Didn't you call Michelle after we saw those guys at the night before Thanksgiving?

MELISSA

After we saw who?

BRIDGET

How can you not remember this?

MELISSA

Bridget, it was THE NIGHT BEFORE THANKSGIVING!

MICHELLE

Who are you talking about?

BRIDGET

On the night before Thanksgiving, which is, of course, Black Wednesday, the biggest bar night of the year, we ran into Terri and Kristen. And Katie, I think. And when we were leaving, we said that we'd see them tonight, at your thing, and they said no they weren't coming, they had a wine tasting to go to. So Melissa told them she'd tell you the next time she saw you on the block or she'd call you.

MELISSA

And I never did that.

MICHELLE

Oh.

MELISSA

Sorry.

MICHELLE

There's wine here. This wine is good.

BRIDGET

Yes.

MICHELLE

Why wouldn't they want to come here and drink good, expensive wine at my house? Where was this wine tasting?

BRIDGET

No idea.

MELISSA

I would guess that they chose that, over this, because I don't think they needed to put any effort into that party.

MICHELLE

What?

BRIDGET

That's true. To get the wine here, you have to bake a lot of shit.

MICHELLE

People like to bake.

SHEILA

Of course they do. Maybe they just wanted a change of pace this year. Or maybe, *probably*, they couldn't get out of it. Like it was at a great aunt's house or something.

JUDY

Those girls are cousins.

SHEILA

See, Michelle? It was probably a family thing.

MICHELLE

Even if it was, they could have called.

BRIDGET

But they thought Melissa called you.

TRISH

And you've still got what? Three more after them?

MICHELLE

Right. Mary, Diana and Deb.

FRAN

I saw Mary at the station just yesterday, paying a parking ticket. She said she'd called you that morning and told you she wasn't coming.

MICHELLE

She must've left a message.

FRAN

Didn't you get it?

MICHELLE

Obviously not. Maybe Ken erased it before I heard it.

FRAN

Mary isn't coming, Michelle.

JUDY

I wouldn't bet on Deb either. She's got the Christmas play with the kids coming up next weekend. I'm sure she's busy with that.

MICHELLE

She didn't call to say she wasn't coming.

BRIDGET

Maybe Ken erased that message too.

MICHELLE

What's that supposed to mean?

BRIDGET

Did you get a message?

MICHELLE

Do I look like I got a message?

BRIDGET

I don't know. What does a person who got a message look like?

SHEILA

So all we're waiting on is Diana, right? Michelle, why don't you call her? She's usually on time.

MICHELLE

Fine. *(takes cell phone from purse, making call)* I'll call her. I'm sure she's not coming. Why would she come? Why would anyone come? *(talking into phone)* Hi, Mike. It's Michelle Kiernan. Is Diana around? Oh really? Sounds like fun. Where'd she fly off to? Okay. Thanks. Bye bye. *(hang up)* What a surprise—she's not coming.

JUDY

That's too bad. I like catching up with her.

SHEILA

Where is she?

MICHELLE

She and some friends from work did a girls' weekend in New Orleans.

BRIDGET

Oh my.

MELISSA

That is one sexy city.

SHEILA

I've never been there.

BRIDGET

Oh boy. You think Mardi Gras is only right before Lent?

MELISSA

Not in the Big Easy.

BRIDGET

That place is crawling with masked hookers and topless college girls and there's booze on every corner and let me tell you . . .

MELISSA

No matter what you're doing, everyone looks the other way. You could be having upside down sex in an alley and people would just glance at you and keep walking.

BRIDGET

Because they know there's something just as crazy going on in the next alley!

MELISSA

And, really, you can get away with everything in New Orleans.

JUDY

People have sex upside down?

MELISSA

Oh not really –

BRIDGET

Oh, Judy, they totally do! Sometimes just one person is upside down, but once in New Orleans, I saw two acrobats, both standing on their hands, having sex with each other. And they were both men.

MELISSA

I never learned to stand on my hands.

BRIDGET

You need a lot of upper body strength.

JUDY

I need some air.

(She moves quickly to the front door and exits—if feasible. Alternatively, she could simply move to a window and throw it open, removing herself from interaction for the next few minutes)

SHEILA

(again, filling a lull) Fran, is Jimmy still swimming?

TRISH

Your husband is a swimmer?

FRAN

No, my son. Mine and my ex-husband's son. Our son. But we're not married. Anymore.

TRISH

I get it.

SHEILA

So is he still swimming?

FRAN

He's doing great at it. It sometimes seems strange to me, though. Just the facts of it. I drive far, up to an hour sometimes, he jumps in a pool and we see if he can get to the other side faster than the other kids.

MELISSA

And does he?

FRAN

More often than not.

BRIDGET

Then there's no problem. He's winning.

FRAN

I know, but other kids aren't.

MELISSA

Why do you give a shit about other kids?

MICHELLE

Now, Melissa, it does take a village to raise a child.

MELISSA

Actually it takes a private school and a lifetime supply of booze.

FRAN

You guys haven't been to a lot of swim meets, I guess. The first big meet Jimmy ever swam in, he got disqualified in two out of three races. And I thought about lying to him and saying he came in fifth or something. But then I got worried that his coaches would mention it at practice—like “Here's why you got disqualified, Jimmy.” And I didn't want him to be caught off guard, so I told him. And the whole way home he cried. And I was driving, thinking, “What am I doing to this kid?”

SHEILA

But that doesn't happen anymore, right?

FRAN

No. Now he wins. But I see other kids--this one kid stopped half way through a race and grabbed the lane line. He just stayed there. He panicked. And when the kid finally made it out, the whole place went completely up for grabs. And I was clapping, and I was thinking, “Are we clapping because the kid didn't drown? Are we clapping because he was brave?”

MICHELLE

I never understood that either.

(JUDY returns)

Like when my brother played football in high school, and someone got hurt. Even if they got taken in the ambulance, they'd give a wave to the crowd and everyone would cheer.

JUDY

You're clapping out of relief. Thank God you've got reason to clap, if you weren't clapping it would be because the person was dead, or unconscious.

BRIDGET

I clapped for an unconscious person once.

MELISSA

You what?

BRIDGET

It was more like we were clapping in appreciation for the ambulance guys.

TRISH

Was this at a football game?

BRIDGET

No. Basketball. A guy went up to dunk and a guy from the other team slipped and fell underneath him. The guy dunking came down and landed on the other guy's neck or something.

JUDY

Did it turn out that he was okay?

BRIDGET

I don't know.

MELISSA

You don't remember?

BRIDGET

They played the rest of the game, and then we went to a kegger in the Forest Preserves.

JUDY

Didn't it say in the paper the next day?

BRIDGET

I didn't read the paper. I was 15.

MICHELLE

Bridget, he must've been okay. You would have remembered if he died.

SHEILA

Sometimes people don't remember things like that.

FRAN

Well, I need to be getting off to the station. Are you going to sort the cookies, Michelle?

MICHELLE

There are so few of us, we'll get it done quickly. Why don't you come back in an hour or so? Can you take a break then or something? Come back and pick yours up?

FRAN

Sure. I can make that work. Before I leave, can I grab an ibuprofen? My head is aching a little.

MICHELLE

Sure. *(Goes to kitchen and calls back)* Oh. There's none in here. *(Re-enters)* Sheila, will you run upstairs and grab an ibuprofen for Fran?

SHEILA

Sure. *(Goes)*

JUDY

Is your job going well, Fran?

FRAN

It is, Judy. I really enjoy my work.

JUDY

I'm sure your dad would be so proud of you.

FRAN

Thanks for saying so. It means a lot.

SHEILA

(re-entering) There weren't any up there. The cupboards are bare!

MICHELLE

Did you check the skinny cabinet?

SHEILA

Empty.

MICHELLE

Oh, Fran, I'm really sorry. Looks like we're out. Maybe Ken took the bottle on his trip. Do they have some at the station?

MELISSA & BRIDGET

(simultaneously) I have some in my purse. Jinx! You owe me a box of wine.

(BRIDGET gives pills to FRAN while all ad lib goodbyes)

TRISH

Does anybody else smoke? I'm gonna step outside and smoke real quick.

MELISSA

I'll go too.

BRIDGET

I'm going if you're going. Judy?

JUDY

No, I don't smoke.

BRIDGET

Neither do I. I just stand there.

MELISSA

She just wants to be with the cool people.

JUDY

Well, then, I'm going to run to the restroom while you gals are outside.

The 4 women exit to their respective destinations.

SHEILA

Going good so far, don't you think?

MICHELLE

Are you kidding? Even less people are here than I expected, the cookie selection is poor, one guest already cried, and we've talked about 2 dead people.

SHEILA

Plus, you had no ibuprofen.

MICHELLE

Right.

SHEILA

Anywhere.

MICHELLE

So?

SHEILA

Your bathroom cabinets are empty.

MICHELLE

Maybe if you had remembered her father's death, she wouldn't have had a headache.

SHEILA

Maybe. But I'm not saying your cabinets are empty of ibuprofen. I'm saying they are empty. There's no tampons, no blowdryer, no nasty bath salt someone bought you for Christmas . . .

MICHELLE

There's no bath stuff?

SHEILA

No.

MICHELLE

(pause) Ken must've thrown it all out.

SHEILA

Did he throw out your toothbrush?

MICHELLE

No. I took that.

SHEILA

Took it where?

MICHELLE

To my sister's. *(long pause)* I'm staying there.

SHEILA

You don't live in this house?

MICHELLE

Not right now.

SHEILA

(a statement) Your mother doesn't have the flu.

MICHELLE

I told her I cancelled the party.

SHEILA

Why?

MICHELLE

Because it was easier than having her here.

JUDY enters.

JUDY

Michelle, that candle you've got going upstairs is lovely. What's that scent?

SHEILA

I brought that candle, Judy. My mother-in-law makes them. That one is linen scented.

JUDY

It's very pleasant. It's not at all overwhelming.

SHEILA

That's what she strives for—not to overwhelm. She succeeds with the candles, not so much in other areas.

JUDY

I think I'll step outside for a minute, check on the girls.

SHEILA

Round 'em up!

JUDY exits.

You've moved out?

MICHELLE

Yes.

SHEILA

When?

MICHELLE

About a month ago.

SHEILA

(A statement) You're throwing a party in a house in which you no longer reside.

MICHELLE

I did reside here when I sent out the invitations.

SHEILA

Okay. Does Ken know you're here, with all these people?

MICHELLE

No. I didn't figure there was any reason to tell him. He'd be out of town. You certainly won't tell him.

SHEILA

What if he'd had the locks changed or something?

MICHELLE

He did.

SHEILA

What?!?!

MICHELLE

We got in a big fight and I said, "I'm leaving!" I slept at my sister's and when I came back the next day, my key didn't work. But he forgot to change the garage door code. I don't think he knows how to do that.

SHEILA

You broke into this house?!?!

MICHELLE

I hardly think it's breaking in if you know the code.

SHEILA

I think I disagree.

MICHELLE

There's no point in arguing about it now. It's underway. Why don't you call the ladies in and we'll start sorting cookies?

SHEILA

(A moment, then opens door and calls out) We're going to start sorting cookies in a minute. Are you coming in? *(A muffled response)* Okay! *(To MICHELLE)* They said give them a minute and a half.

MICHELLE

Okay. Actually, that's good. That gives us enough time to throw Fran's cookies out.

SHEILA

You can't really do that.

MICHELLE

Why not? She'll never know.

SHEILA

When she doesn't have a dozen of her own, she'll get a little suspicious.

MICHELLE

Good thinking. Save a dozen to give back to her. *(A look from SHEILA)* I'm not passing out these cookies, Sheila. I have enough working against me right now--I don't need to make people sick on top of it. I made two kinds of cookies. We'll pass the chocolate centered things off as Fran's. Pretend I gave her the recipe. She made them and they're great!

SHEILA

Fine. It's your party.

MICHELLE

You bet it is. *(She pulls 12 cookies from Fran's box.)*

SHEILA

What if she goes to throw something out when she comes back? She'll see them in there.

MICHELLE

No, she won't. We'll throw them in the yard. The squirrels can eat them. There won't be any evidence.

SHEILA

But all the women are standing out there.

MICHELLE

Throw them out back. *(pushes box at SHEILA)* Do it.

SHEILA exits. A door opening is heard, cookies being thrown and landing, a dog barking, a door closing. SHEILA returns.

SHEILA

I didn't know the Sullivans had a dog.

MICHELLE

I think they just got it. It sounds like a puppy. You didn't throw any cookies over the fence did you? Chocolate can make a dog really sick.

SHEILA

Nope. All right in your yard. Right outside the door. The only thing eating them will be squirrels.

(MELISSA and BRIDGET enter)

MICHELLE

I hope squirrels can eat chocolate.

MELISSA

What a wonderful Christmas wish!

SHEILA

Very funny. Do either of you know if other animals besides dogs get sick from chocolate?

BRIDGET

I've never heard of anything other than dogs.

MELISSA

Me neither. And I think that's a myth.

BRIDGET

I think it depends on the size of the dog. And maybe the breed.

MICHELLE

There you have it.

BRIDGET

Why? What animals are eating chocolate?

MICHELLE

Oh. I burned some cookies earlier and I wanted to get rid of them, so I threw them in the yard. Sheila's afraid the squirrels are going to eat them and die.

MELISSA

Why didn't you just throw them in the trash?

MICHELLE

Because they were hot. I didn't want the trash bag to melt. And I needed the cookie sheet for the next batch.

(JUDY and TRISH enter)

JUDY

We were admiring all the lights in the neighborhood while we were outside.

MICHELLE

They do look nice, don't they?

SHEILA

Everyone on this street tries to out-do their neighbor. It's kind of an overly competitive attitude for the holidays.

MICHELLE

But the result is so nice. I think we have the best looking stretch in the subdivision. Bridget, you guys do a great job. And Melissa, hasn't your house won the Tinsel Time Contest the last two years?

MELISSA

Yeah, thanks to me.

JUDY

You do all that yourself?

MELISSA

We have a stupid method of doing it, really. Tim spends the Friday and Saturday after Thanksgiving doing all of it, and then I spend the week after that re-doing it, because he does such a shitty job.

SHEILA

Really?

BRIDGET

She's not lying. She calls me before she gets up on the ladder to let me know that if I hear screaming, I should come help her.

MELISSA

I've never fallen.

TRISH

Why don't you just do it the first time?

MELISSA

Because Tim thinks it's his job.

TRISH

But doesn't he get mad when you re-do all of it?

MELISSA

He doesn't know I do it.

MICHELLE

What does he think happens? Christmas elves?

MELISSA

I don't think he sees the difference between how he does it and how it looks after I fix it.

JUDY

I'd never get up on the roof.

MELISSA

If you lived on this block, and it came down to it, you would.

MICHELLE

On that note, before we begin sorting the cookies, let's raise our glasses.

BRIDGET

Wait, I'm empty.

TRISH

Me too.

(A pause and activity while all women get fresh drinks)

MICHELLE

A toast. For a very Merry Christmas for this group of women, who are capable of more than meets the eye.

SHEILA

Here here.

(All clink glasses, share holiday wishes)

MICHELLE

Let me go get the boxes and then we can begin sorting. Did everyone bring enough to take a dozen of her own?

BRIDGET

I brought a lot more than that. I thought there would be 18 people here.

TRISH

Right. Judy told me 18 dozen.

MICHELLE

Super. We'll just all get extra then. *(moves to get boxes)*

JUDY

She seems upset that everyone didn't come.

SHEILA

It's sort of a let down, Judy, when you plan for 18 and 6 show up.

JUDY

I suppose.

MELISSA

We're all going to end up taking home 200 cookies. Does everyone realize that?

BRIDGET

Who cares? I'm just planning to get fat until Little Christmas, then I'll turn things around.

TRISH

You'll have an epiphany?

BRIDGET

On the Epiphany, yes. I do it every year.

MELISSA

Does it count as an epiphany if you plan it in advance?

BRIDGET

You want me not to have it? I should just keep getting fat until Valentine's Day? You want a fat best friend?

MELISSA

No.

BRIDGET

You probably do. Then you'd look super skinny next to me.

JUDY

Oh dear.

MICHELLE enters, carrying a stack of boxes of the kind that need to be assembled by folding.

MICHELLE

Here we go. Is everything okay in here?

BRIDGET

Everything's fine. We were just discussing our plans to manage holiday eating.

MICHELLE

Oh, that can be tough.

MELISSA

We've got it all figured out.

MICHELLE

The key is to have a plan. *(Pause)* Does anyone know how to fold these boxes?

JUDY

Oh, I do! I worked in a bakery when I was a girl.

TRISH

I'm sure I can figure it out!

SHEILA

I'll pitch in, too. You worked in a bakery, Judy? I never knew that.

JUDY

Oh, I was very young. It was my uncle's shop and my brothers and my sister all worked there before me. I was only 14 when I started. My uncle was more successful by then, and older, and he had hired a Polish woman to run things while he was tending to other businesses.

TRISH

I bet she was like a second mom to you! All warm and covered in flour and smelling like cookies?

From now until dialogue indicates, JUDY, TRISH and SHEILA fold boxes. JUDY folds mechanically, as it is an action she has ingrained in her. TRISH and SHEILA struggle. JUDY may correct their mistakes, or not. It may be that

TRISH spends the entire time working on one box, or that TRISH and SHEILA must join forces to complete each box. Perhaps they also mark boxes with guests' names.

JUDY

Um, no, actually. She was horrible to me. My grandparents had emigrated from Poland to the States, and so had this woman. Stasia (*STAY-shuh*) was her name. She hated me because my grandparents came from the Polish lowlands and Stasia and her family came from the highlands. I'd walk in there on Saturday mornings and she'd say, "Matka Boska, (*Maht-kuh bo-skuh*) the lazy lowlander made it to work today! Now the boxes can get folded!"

SHEILA

What did she say?

JUDY

Matka Boska—it means "Mother of God!" She'd never let me do anything except fold the boxes. She said, "Your dirty lowland hands can't make the white bread!"

MELISSA

What a bitch!

BRIDGET

Did you tell your uncle?

JUDY

He was never around.

MICHELLE

What about your parents?

JUDY

I told them she wouldn't let me do anything except the boxes and my mother said it was because I had just started and I had to work my way up to other things. I didn't say anything to my father. I felt protective of him.

MICHELLE

That's too sweet.

MELISSA

Way too sweet. I'd have sent my dad to kick the dough bitch's ass.

SHEILA

How long did you work there?

JUDY

Two years—until I turned sixteen.

BRIDGET

Then you told her off and quit?!?

JUDY

No, my uncle closed the bakery because it was losing money. *(Pause)* The funny thing is—I've never been to Poland. I wouldn't know the lowlands if you dropped me right in the middle of them. *(Pause)* But I can fold boxes. One good thing came out of that job.

MELISSA

That was your first job? And your worst one, I bet.

JUDY

Absolutely. It couldn't go anywhere but up after that.

MELISSA

Sheila, what was your worst job?

SHEILA

That's easy! It was after freshman year of college, and it didn't look like I was going to be able to afford sophomore year, so I had to do something drastic. There were always these signs up in the dorms about making a lot of money over the summer working in Alaska, so I looked into that and ending up doing it.

TRISH

What did you have to do?

SHEILA

I gutted fish.

JUDY

What?!?

SHEILA

I gutted fish for three months and made \$6,000. I didn't actually gut them, I took the gutted fish and stacked them in a freezer. The two women who did the gutting had seven teeth between them. I had to wear thigh high rubber boots and a lab coat. I smelled until October, but I got to go back to school.

JUDY

Oh my goodness! That's horrible.

SHEILA

It was a quick fix, and it left me with very low expectations. I appreciated every job I ever had after that.

TRISH

Bridget, what was yours?

BRIDGET

My worst job? Teaching! How anyone can do it, I'll never know. I use to hide in the construction paper closet.

MELISSA

I did telemarketing for a friend of my dad's when I was in high school. This is pre-computer, pre-headset, all that. We used to just run a ruler down pages of the phone book and dial and ask people if they were interested in getting a free quote on their car insurance. One time a woman got really excited and then I figured out she thought I had offered her a free *coat*.

TRISH

Oh! Did you feel so sorry for her?

MELISSA

I did, actually. I hardly ever feel sympathy, but this woman sounded like she really needed a coat. I was trying to get her to insure a car she probably didn't even have and she was looking for a free coat.

BRIDGET

You do have poor diction.

MELISSA

No I don't.

JUDY

What did you say to her?

MELISSA

I got nervous, so I made some crackly noise into the phone and hung up.

TRISH

I had a job where I felt sorry for the people, too. I grew up in a really small town and I worked in the old folk's home. The town was really small. There were only 8 residents in the home. But it was a summer job. I basically wiped butts all day. Six of the residents were in adult diapers, and I was the newest employee, so all that stuff fell to me.

JUDY

I don't look forward to the day I can't take care of myself. I can see why you felt sorry for the residents, Trish.

TRISH

Oh, actually it wasn't the residents I felt bad for. I had another job, on Friday and Saturday nights. I made pizzas at the gas station. I felt so bad for anyone who bought one of my pizzas, because even though I washed my hands like crazy, I was pretty sure there was some poop on those pizzas.

MELISSA

That is gross!

BRIDGET

What was the name of your town? Any chance any of us ever drove through it?

TRISH

Never mind! How about you, Michelle?

MICHELLE

Me? Gosh, I don't know.

SHEILA

Just admit it, Michelle.

MICHELLE

I don't know what the big deal is. I've never had a job.

JUDY

Really?

TRISH

Get out!

MICHELLE

I didn't work in high school. I got a tennis scholarship to college, then after my freshman year they dissolved the tennis program. They had already guaranteed me four years, so I did the rest for free. I met Ken my junior year. I traveled for a while after I graduated and then spent six months planning the wedding, married Ken, redecorated the house, you know.

TRISH

Wow.

MICHELLE

I had some interviews right after the wedding, but nothing came of them. And then Ken said what was the point, he was at a firm already, making enough money. I could stay home. We both figured I'd quit when we had kids anyway, so why even start?

SHEILA

You did have a sort of job for a little bit.

MICHELLE

Oh, c'mon, Sheila. You can't bring that up! It didn't last very long. Plus, I never even got paid!

TRISH

What was it?

MICHELLE

It was nothing. Ken told me his mom needed help at her daycare one year, when one of her teachers had to quit right before the holidays. Pre-term labor or something.

TRISH

His mom runs a daycare?

MICHELLE

She's very good with kids.

SHEILA

Just not so good with adults.

BRIDGET

She's the opposite of me.

TRISH

Don't you have to be certified to work in a daycare?

MICHELLE

I didn't get paid, and no one ever questioned it. It's a little private preschool actually, sort of exclusive. It's like the place that people put their kids when they think their own parenting is inadequate.

TRISH

Okay. And?

MICHELLE

I started at the beginning of November and it was going okay. I was just like an aid or whatever, making sure the kids only ate the non-toxic art supplies, they didn't kill the hamster. And then Thanksgiving came and we went over to Ken's parents' house. I was

bringing the stuffing and I had found a recipe that had dates and cranberries in it. I thought it sounded good. I worked really hard on it, because it was the kind you have to dry the bread out for a week in brown bags and then you knead it for hours.

SHEILA

Literally, hours.

MICHELLE

Sheila came over and we took turns kneading. On Thanksgiving, I brought it over there and when Ken's mom went to put it out, she shot me a look that could've set me on fire. She said, "Is this the only stuffing you brought?" And I said, "Isn't it enough?" And she said, "Oh it's enough! Enough to kill a few people!" It turns out Wally, my father-in-law, and Ken, my husband, are both allergic to cranberries. I didn't know this. But she flipped.

SHEILA

And she fired you.

MICHELLE

Oh, right! The daycare. She fired me, from a volunteer job, in front of all their relatives. At the table. She said, "Michelle, if you can't even avoid making people vomit on a holiday, how can I allow you to oversee the children with whose care I have been entrusted? You're fired."

SHEILA

She's like a Disney villain.

MICHELLE

I know, but she could've waited til the next school day.

MELISSA

Was the stuffing good, at least?

MICHELLE

I never found out. She dumped it all in the trash.

BRIDGET

Oh, Michelle, she is psycho.

MICHELLE

I know.

SHEILA

Yeah! Who would take something someone worked on and just throw it out the window—not even give it a try?

MICHELLE

Well, I don't know, Sheila. *(Pause)* I don't know who would do that.

JUDY

You do keep busy, though. Your mom is always saying how on-the-go you are.

MICHELLE

That's true. I'd like to be a caterer. I actually looked into it a year or so ago. But Ken said he didn't want me dishing out green beans almondine and washing table cloths. I said I might try to start my own business and Ken pointed out that I'm really not qualified. He asked me if I knew how to do a spreadsheet and when I said I didn't really know what a spreadsheet was, we kind of let the idea go.

MELISSA

What's your degree in?

MICHELLE

Psych.

TRISH

Too bad no one will pay you to analyze your mother-in-law.

MICHELLE

That would take the rest of my life.

JUDY

Ladies, the boxes are ready, shall we sort the cookies?

MICHELLE

Does anyone need a drink? *(All raise glasses and MICHELLE proceeds to refill them)*
Which cookies should we start with?

TRISH

Oh, let's just get mine handed out. I feel so stupid bringing bakery stuff.

MICHELLE

Please forget about it. It's really okay.

TRISH

I just had the girl slice me up a few trays of brownies, actually. *(Goes to her own boxes and opens them)* I just count out a dozen for everybody?

MICHELLE

Why don't you make it 18 a piece? That way there will be fewer leftover.

JUDY

You can wrap the leftovers and drop them at the houses of the people who couldn't make it!

BRIDGET

Are you kidding?

MELISSA

No way!

BRIDGET

If you want the cookies you have to come.

MELISSA

Otherwise, no one will come next year, Michelle.

MICHELLE

That's true. Trish, make it an even two dozen in each box. I'll give the rest to the homeless.

TRISH

Great.

She begins distributing the brownies, starting with MELISSA's and BRIDGET's boxes.

MELISSA

Yes, the homeless are great. What's in these bad boys, Trish?

TRISH

I don't know. I got them at the grocery store.

MELISSA

Which one?

BRIDGET

Stoner and Sons?

MICHELLE

What's that supposed to mean?

BRIDGET

These look like pot brownies!

MICHELLE

Bridget, come on!

MELISSA

They really do.

TRISH

They are sort of lumpy, but I'm sure they're not pot brownies.

JUDY

I didn't know you could make brownies in a pot.

MELISSA

What?

JUDY

Do you bake them right in the pot?

BRIDGET

No, Judy. Pot brownies have pot in them. Marijuana. Baked inside.

JUDY

That's not true!

MELISSA

You eat them to get stoned.

JUDY

That's not true. You girls are pulling my leg.

TRISH

No. It is true, Judy, but I'm sure these brownies have no pot in them. If they do, I really got a bargain.

MELISSA, BRIDGET and TRISH all laugh.

MICHELLE

That's not funny. You are making Judy uncomfortable.

JUDY

That's all right. I'm not ashamed to say I wouldn't know what pot brownies looked like if I had one on my plate. Or pot, for that matter. You could scoop me up a scoop of pot and I wouldn't know it from cinnamon.

BRIDGET

Melissa, why don't you scoop Judy a scoop of pot?!?!

MELISSA is laughing too hard to answer.

JUDY
What's funny now?

BRIDGET
Pot doesn't come in scoops, that's all.

JUDY
Then how does it come?

MELISSA
It comes in a bag, usually in Bridget's underwear drawer.

BRIDGET
Shut up! Then you can put it in brownies, or roll a joint, or use a one-hitter, or a bong . . .

JUDY
I've never had a bong.

BRIDGET
. . . or a pipe, or a water bong . . .

JUDY
I've never had a bong.

TRISH
Judy, you don't "have" a bong.

JUDY
Well, I've never seen one, or used one, or been in the same room with one.

MELISSA
Remember Peanut?

BRIDGET
Of course I do.

MELISSA
We knew this guy who made a water bong out of a two-liter pop bottle.

SHEILA
Really?

TRISH
How?

MELISSA

It involved duct tape and a bendy straw, I think.

BRIDGET

That kid was amazing with a two-liter bottle. He made all kinds of things. He made a two-liter spitter, when chew was popular. He made a two-liter weapon, by filling it with quick dry cement.

MELISSA

He was like George Washington Carver with the peanut. He was the George Washington Carver of the two-liter bottle.

MICHELLE

Maybe that's how he got his nickname.

BRIDGET and MELISSA

He got his nickname because his dick was shaped funny like a peanut.

They stare suspiciously at each other.

JUDY

Girls!

MICHELLE

Okay, that's enough.

BRIDGET

How did you know that?

MELISSA

How do you think I know that?

BRIDGET

Tell me.

MELISSA

I did it with him behind Carolyn Price's shed.

BRIDGET

Shut up! I did it with him in Carolyn Price's shed!

MELISSA

We've never shared this?!?

BRIDGET

I know why. It was that one summer that you were pissed at me because I got the same haircut as you!

MELISSA

And it looked better on you!

MICHELLE

Who brought these delicious chocolate coconut hearts?

MELISSA

I'm sorry Michelle, after all this talk about sex with Peanut, I need a smoke.

BRIDGET

Me too. And I'm really gonna have one this time.

TRISH

(standing) When in Rome . . .

SHEILA

Did they smoke in Rome?

TRISH

I have no idea.

The three smokers exit.

MICHELLE

Judy, are you having a nice time? I know Melissa and Bridget can be a lot to take.

JUDY

Oh, I've known those girls since they were teenyboppers and they've always been like that. They certainly can't spoil the evening for me, if that's what you're asking.

MICHELLE

I'm glad for that. Thank you.

JUDY

And the chocolate coconut things are mine.

MICHELLE

Those look fantastic.

SHEILA

What else is there?

MICHELLE

I made the apricot amaretto cookies and the chocolate (*a slight pause, realizes her mistake*) surprises,

(*a sharp look from SHEILA*)

it looks like Melissa brought some kind of meringue things, Bridget always makes the checkerboard bars, Trish, of course, brought the brownies. What did you bring, Sheila?

SHEILA

I made pecan cups.

JUDY

Oh, good. I like those.

MICHELLE

And that's it.

JUDY

What about Fran?

MICHELLE

Who? Oh, Fran? She brought . . . um . . . did you look in that box earlier, Sheila?

SHEILA

I did. (*Pause*) I saw that Fran brought something that looked like a black and white cookie, but not what one might consider a black and white cookie in the traditional sense.

JUDY

Oh, sometimes she misses the mark, doesn't she? God bless her. (*a yawn/sigh*) So then, shall I go hurry up the sex fiends so we can finish this up?

After a nod from MICHELLE, JUDY exits.

MICHELLE

Thanks, Judy. Damn it! Sheila, why didn't you lie?

SHEILA

I couldn't very well say that Fran didn't bring any cookies! Judy knows she did! And Fran's coming back anyway. You blew it!

MICHELLE

Did not!

SHEILA

Did too! Why didn't you say Fran made your cookies?!? Why didn't you stick with the plan?!?!

MICHELLE

Well, you could've thought of something better. You're a really bad liar.

SHEILA

You know? I'm okay with that.

MICHELLE

But now we have to go retrieve some of the black and whites to put in Judy's box.

SHEILA

They're going to be all dirty.

MICHELLE

Brush them off.

SHEILA

What? You're making me go out there?!?

MICHELLE

I'm the hostess. But you only need to get enough for Judy. We're not giving them to anyone but Fran and Judy.

The other women return.

JUDY

(as if finishing a list). . . then I made the coconut hearts and Fran left a box of black and whites!

MICHELLE shoots a look to SHEILA. Everyone needs FRAN's cookies.

SHEILA

I'm going to step out back for a bit. I'm feeling a little dizzy. Must be the wine.

JUDY

It's gotten a bit colder. The wind is picking up.

SHEILA

Great. That's just what I need.

MICHELLE

Sheila, we're going to go on sorting without you, if that's okay.

SHEILA

It's perfectly fine.

SHEILA exits to the backyard.

JUDY

I can go ahead and distribute mine.

JUDY begins counting out 24 cookies and putting them in the boxes.

TRISH

How do you make these Judy? They're all so uniform.

JUDY

About ten years ago, one of my daughters bought me a special pan for Christmas. It's a really thick, sturdy pan, like a pan for small cupcakes, but shaped like hearts.

TRISH

Oh, these are too cute.

MELISSA

If I got kitchen stuff for Christmas, I'd throw it out the window.

BRIDGET

I'd fling it right at Kevin's head.

JUDY

Not me! That was an expensive pan. I love good kitchen stuff.

MICHELLE

So do I, Judy. I love to cook something new and have it be a big success.

SHEILA enters with a bakery box, looking distracted.

BRIDGET

Feel better, Sheila?

SHEILA

What? Uh-huh.

BRIDGET

What's in the box?

SHEILA

Oh, these are the cookies Fran brought. They were in the kitchen. But . . . it looks like she didn't make very many. There are only about two dozen in here.

JUDY

Why wouldn't Fran bring enough cookies? She comes every year.

MICHELLE

That's not enough for the people who are here, let alone the people who were supposed to be!

SHEILA

Right. Right. I don't know why she would do that.

JUDY

Maybe there's a second box.

TRISH

That's probably it. She couldn't fit them all in one box, so she put whatever was leftover in this box.

MICHELLE

(looking at SHEILA) Which is obviously the second box. Let's all take a look through these boxes and see if we can't find the one that's full of black and white cookies.

The women begin looking through the boxes around the room, including the empty boxes folded by JUDY. SHEILA moves close to MICHELLE.

SHEILA

There's a dead dog in your yard.

MICHELLE

A what?

SHEILA

A dead dog. I believe it was killed by eating Fran's cookies.

MICHELLE

Oh my God. Whose dog is it?

SHEILA

Sullivans, I guess.

MICHELLE

These are the only cookies it didn't eat?

SHEILA

The only ones it didn't eat, or vomit on.

MICHELLE

Oh boy. So chocolate really can kill dogs.

SHEILA

It might have choked. The cookies were really hard. What are you going to tell the Sullivans?

MICHELLE

Their dog was trespassing, Sheila. It's not my fault. When it stiffens up, just throw it over the fence.

SHEILA

If you think I'm touching a rigor mortis dog, you're insane. It wasn't my idea to throw the cookies outside, Michelle.

MICHELLE

We can't undo it, Sheila. *(To everyone)* I'm sure they'll turn up. Let's just sort the rest. I could swear she only walked in with one box. Maybe she left the other in her car by accident.

SHEILA

Right. I'll do the pecan cups. *(Pause)* You were right, Judy. It's freezing out there. I won't be going outside again.

MICHELLE

Sheila, you do get overheated sometimes. You never know, you might need to go out again.

SHEILA

I really doubt it.

MICHELLE

Well, never say never! Bridget, why don't you sort yours now as well?

BRIDGET

Sure.

JUDY

Do you really think Fran is driving her squad car around right now with a box of cookies next to her? Wouldn't she notice a big box of cookies?

MICHELLE

I don't know, Judy. Maybe. Bridget, tell me again how you make this checkerboard pattern.

BRIDGET

It's not that hard, Michelle.

JUDY

You'd think she would've noticed them by now and brought them back.

MICHELLE

Because, Bridget, this kind of baking is beyond me! My presentation skills are pretty good with dinners and hors d'oeuvres, but I know I am lacking in desserts.

BRIDGET

Michelle, I just followed the recipe! What's more, it came out of one of those cookbook pamphlet-y things you buy at the checkout. It's not like it's an old family secret or anything.

JUDY

Michelle, where did you say Ken was again?

BRIDGET

Even if it was a family secret, I'd probably tell you. I don't really care who knows my stuff.

MICHELLE

I don't know if I did. He's in New Orleans, on business.

MELISSA

Maybe he'll run into Diana McGrath and her gal-pals down there.

BRIDGET

(Wistful) Wouldn't it be great if Ken did see them down there and they were all at a lesbian bar or something and Diana was actually a lesbian and then we all found out?

TRISH

That would mean Ken would have to go into a lesbian bar. Michelle, is that likely?

MICHELLE

What? Oh, I wouldn't guess so. You know they say if you can read, you can cook, but I don't think that's exactly true. With checkerboard cookies, you need to have some manipulative skill, you know? You need to be able to make the dough go where you want it.

BRIDGET

It's not hard, Michelle, I'll give you the stupid book, but back to the lesbians. So if Ken doesn't go into a lesbian bar, maybe he just sees Diana on the street, making out with a woman, or a drag queen even.

JUDY

Are we back to this already—this New Orleans inappropriate activity talk?

MELISSA

I'm just saying, Judy, you've never been there. It's not like Chicago. Not like anywhere in the Midwest. New Orleans is a city filled with curbside debauchery.

SHEILA

So what if that even happened? Does everyone have pecan cups? So what if Ken came back and told us that? What would that do?

MELISSA

It would shake things up around here. There's not a lot of excitement in the Bluff these days.

TRISH

But don't you live here for the peacefulness?

BRIDGET

Diana McGrath being a secret lesbian will not disrupt my peace, it will just give me something to talk about with Melissa.

JUDY

What do you talk about now, or will it offend me?

MELISSA

We've been talking about Michelle's new family room furniture.

MICHELLE

What? Why are you talking about that?

BRIDGET

Because.

TRISH

Can I see it? Where is it?

MICHELLE

It's through the kitchen and down the stairs. Of course you can see it. (*TRISH exits*)
Why is my furniture something to talk about?

SHEILA

Because it's new, probably.

MICHELLE

Wait, you're in on this?!?

SHEILA

I'm not in on anything. I'm just saying, when someone gets new furniture, people talk about it.

MICHELLE

Is it ugly? If it's ugly why didn't someone say something to me when I showed you all the swatches and the design?!?!

JUDY

I don't think it's ugly.

BRIDGET

It's not ugly.

TRISH enters.

MELISSA

It's just new.

TRISH

I really like it.

BRIDGET

And it was acquired through unconventional means.

MELISSA

You think you don't have the manipulative skills to make checkerboard cookies? Michelle, you've got that and then some.

MICHELLE

That's not very nice.

BRIDGET

Well, it's not very mean.

MELISSA

It's complimentary.

BRIDGET

Highly.

TRISH

Did you steal it or something?

MICHELLE

Of course not!

JUDY

Trish, how would a person steal furniture?

TRISH

With a fake credit card or something.

JUDY

Oh! I hadn't thought of that.

MICHELLE

Please stop it. I didn't steal the furniture. Who here doesn't know the story?

(TRISH alone raises her hand)

I know *I* told Sheila, but how did the rest of you hear it?

MELISSA

You told us at Patty Hopkin's 40th birthday party.

MICHELLE

I did?

BRIDGET

We were in her basement drinking sangria and you told us.

JUDY

Now, Michelle, your mom told me when we worked the bake sale at church the Sunday after All Soul's Day.

MICHELLE

Oh, well, okay. I'll just zoom through it for Trish then, since the cat's out of the bag. But you can't say anything to Ken, if you ever meet him.

MELISSA

Not likely.

MICHELLE

What? *(MELISSA shrugs)* The furniture we had in our family room was hand me down stuff from Ken's parents.

BRIDGET

But it wasn't old.

MELISSA

It was approaching its mid-life crisis, as I recall. And fifty is the new thirty.

MICHELLE

It wasn't old, but it was ugly. *(Silence)* Ken didn't see the need to replace it, because it was still, as he put it, "serviceable."

TRISH

Okay.

MICHELLE

I figured that I needed to make it unserviceable, so every time I sat on the couch to watch tv or whatever, I dug my fingernail into the fabric on the arm of the couch.

MELISSA

Her nails are strong.

BRIDGET

She gets regular manicures.

MICHELLE

Eventually I made a little hole, but it took time. I kept working in secret, making the hole a little bigger each day. Then finally you could really see it. I waited for Ken to notice it. He didn't. Finally, I put on a bracelet with a lot of little hangy-things on it—one that I always snag on sweaters, and sat on the couch while Ken was watching some game. While he was totally engrossed in the tv, I hooked the bracelet inside the hole. At a commercial, I asked him if he wanted some water. He said yes, I stood up, the couch pulled my arm back, I pulled it forward and ripped a nice clean "L" shape in the fabric.

TRISH

Did you act sorry?

MICHELLE

Not really. I was just like, "Oh shoot! Look what happened."

TRISH

Did he think you did it on purpose?

MICHELLE

No! Who would ever do something like that on purpose? *(Silence)* I meant with the bracelet getting stuck. *(Silence)* What it really shows is how creative I am.

JUDY

I guess I don't care enough about my furniture to go to that much trouble.

MICHELLE

Oh, it was hardly any trouble. I was sitting there anyway, I just had to remember to dig the hole every time.

SHEILA

Are you going to tell them the other half of the story?

BRIDGET

There's more?

MELISSA

Are you holding out?

MICHELLE

No. I'll tell it, but why don't Melissa and I sort our cookies while I talk and then we'll be nearly finished.

MELISSA

Sure.

MICHELLE

My cookies do have amaretto in them, so be careful giving them to kids. Kids don't really like them anyway.

BRIDGET

Spill the beans, Michelle.

MICHELLE

Okay, okay. Ken gave in and said if I'd shut the hell up, he'd let me get new furniture. We went together and picked it out, but he said I was only allowed to order half, then wait three months and order the rest. He said we couldn't afford it all at one time, which is bull, by the way. I said we could do a payment plan, he didn't want to, we argued and yelled. I finally said, screw it, I'd just order half of it. It's good if I can let him think he won.

SHEILA

He does like to win.

MICHELLE

So I ordered half of it. The day before it came, I said, "The first half of the furniture is coming tomorrow," and Ken hauled all the old furniture out to the alley. Someone took it, of course. The next day while he was at work, the new furniture came. Well, half of it. The two end tables, and the coffee table came.

TRISH

No couch?

MICHELLE

No. Nothing to sit on at all. I ordered all the wood pieces. That was how I decided to divide it up. I unboxed all of it and put it all in place before he got home from work. When he saw it, he said, "Why the hell don't we have anything to sit on?" And I said, "Because you told me to order half and I ordered all the wood pieces!" He ran out to the alley, but the old stuff was gone. He actually tried sitting on one of the end tables and watching tv. That didn't last. So the next day he told me to just order the rest of it.

SHEILA

After he screamed at you and stormed out of the house.

MICHELLE

Yes, he did. But I'll take that if I can get all my furniture at once.

TRISH

When was all this?

MICHELLE

About two months ago.

TRISH

And things are fine now?

MICHELLE

Things were never bad. Or they were never worse than they've always been. Plus, they're better now, because I have better furniture.

TRISH

Well, whatever it took to get the furniture down there, it's really nice.

MICHELLE

Thank you. Now, does everyone have every cookie? *(The women all check their boxes and affirm that they have the correct assortment of cookies.)* Great. Let's have another drink, then, and eat a few of the leftovers and then we can call it a night.

JUDY

I'd like to step over to church to see the creche, as long as I'm this close. I haven't seen it all lit up.

MICHELLE

All right. Why don't we all go?

MELISSA

We'll walk over! Maybe baby Jesus wants a smoke.

JUDY

That's fine. But there will be no suggestive rearrangement of the Nativity figures.

MELISSA

We haven't done that since we were 28!

BRIDGET

We promise to behave.

Everyone bundles up, readying to go outside.

SHEILA

I'll go too. To help Judy defend the integrity of the creche. Trish?

TRISH

Okay.

MICHELLE

The coffee will be all ready by the time we get back.

JUDY

Trish, you're going to need gloves and a scarf. It's colder now.

TRISH

Thanks, Judy, I'll be okay with just my coat.

The room clears, and remains empty for 5 seconds or so. KEN enters as if from downstairs. At the same time, Trish re-enters and says, while coming through the door—

Go ahead and say I told you so, Judy! I didn't last 15 seconds! It's freezing!!

KEN

What the hell?!? Tell me she doesn't know!

END OF ACT I

ACT II

TRISH and KEN as we left them at close of Act I.

TRISH

Oh my God!

KEN

Oh **my** God! What are you doing here?

TRISH

What are **you** doing here?

KEN

I thought you were, like, avoiding me, or something. And now you break into my house? Jesus! It's actually nice, and weird, to see you.

TRISH

Oh no. Oh God. Ken—

The doorknob jiggles, muffled voice from other side—MICHELLE calling to women.

KEN

Shhhh! Who's there?!?

MICHELLE

(Entering) Trish, I feel like a bad hostess leaving you in— Ken! What are you doing here? Home. What are you doing home?

KEN

(eyes wide to TRISH, signaling to her not to talk) I'm in my own house. I'm surprised you're here. Both of you. I'm surprised anyone is here.

MICHELLE

I just didn't expect you back. Trish, this is my husband. He was on a trip and I thought he wasn't coming back until after the weekend . . .

KEN

Why would I stay on a business trip over the weekend?

MICHELLE

I don't know. I was puzzled about that myself. *(An awkward embrace)* Trish here just moved in across the way from Judy.

KEN

She did? That's something. Hello, Trish.

TRISH

Hi.

JUDY

(entering) Ken! How nice to see you!

MICHELLE

That was a quick walk!

JUDY

Oh it's so windy out! I gave up after less than half way. It's absolutely freezing now! I'll drive by the creche on my way home. Now Ken, Michelle said she wasn't expecting you back until Monday morning.

KEN

We were just discussing that.

MICHELLE

It's just that you wrote "United, 7:30 a.m." on Monday on the calendar.

KEN

I'm flying out again on Monday morning, at 7:30. Why would I put my return time on the calendar here? How could I look at it from New Orleans?

MICHELLE

I don't know. I thought it was for my benefit.

KEN

And you'd be in the kitchen why?

MICHELLE

People go in the kitchen for any number of reasons, Ken. If you want some coffee, you yourself should go into the kitchen.

KEN

So what's going on here?

MICHELLE

My cookie exchange. There are thousands of cookies here. I'm having my cookie exchange.

KEN

You're having it here?

MICHELLE

I have it here every single year.

KEN

I understand that, but, given the current situation —

MICHELLE

I'm having it here.

The rest of the women return.

BRIDGET

I hope Jesus doesn't mind us waving from afar! Holy shit, it's—(*cold*)! Ken! We didn't expect you here tonight!

SHEILA

I thought I heard the garage door going down as we walked outside.

KEN

Hey Sheila. Girls. I must've pulled in right as you guys headed out.

MELISSA

Want some cookies? There's about 1200 left over.

KEN

I'm not quite that hungry. I'm going to put my stuff upstairs. (*awkwardly*) I just met Trish. She's new!

BRIDGET

Good to see you're up to speed!

(KEN shrugs, takes his bags and goes upstairs)

JUDY

Michelle, he looks wonderful.

MELISSA

He seems a little tense.

MICHELLE

He's always like that after he travels. He gets so stressed on airplanes. You wouldn't think a grown man with such a high stress job—

TRISH

So, do you guys travel a lot?

MICHELLE

Um, not really, but we've been married, let me think, 8 years, and a half, or so. Between 8 and 9 years. So we've taken a few trips.

TRISH

Nine years? Wow.

MICHELLE

It's not that long. Judy's been married almost 30, right?

JUDY

That's right. It seems like a long time when you say the number, but it's really just that much living.

MICHELLE

Ups and downs, valleys and hills.

MELISSA

And nothing that can't be fixed by ripping a hole in the couch.

SHEILA

That's mean.

MELISSA

Not really.

BRIDGET

If something is true then you can't say that it's mean.

JUDY

That's not true.

MELISSA

Then it might be mean.

JUDY

Now stop it. You can say something that is a fact, like "Sally, that haircut you got was a terrible mistake," and even if Sally's hair is awful, it's still mean to say so.

SHEILA

She's got you on that one.

JUDY

There are social mores that dictate what can and cannot be said.

BRIDGET

Social mores. Like a moray eel.

MICHELLE

No, not at all like an eel. Like a person who knows how to be polite.

MELISSA

I wasn't being impolite. I was saying something that was true and also funny. You and Ken have the same kind of problems that we all have. You, Michelle, have an unconventional way of fixing them. You break things and buy new ones.

SHEILA

Let it go, Melissa.

MICHELLE

Seriously. Drop it. He's upstairs. I told you that story because I thought you would like it.

BRIDGET

We **do** like it.

MICHELLE

I know. But I didn't think you were going to throw it back in my face and I certainly didn't expect you to do it while Ken was in the house!

MELISSA

I didn't expect Ken to be in the house! So there! (*sticks out her tongue*)

BRIDGET

I feel like I'm at a junior high sleepover.

TRISH

Why don't you guys cut it out?

BRIDGET

Yeah, you guys might get in trouble for freezing Judy's bra.

JUDY

What?!?

BRIDGET

Maybe Melissa and I should go.

MELISSA

Yeah, probably.

MICHELLE

Fine. Let's find your cookies. *(She gets two boxes with cookies in them.)* Here you go. I think these are yours.

BRIDGET

Oh, we never got the black and whites.

TRISH

Oh, yeah. We never found Fran's other box of cookies.

MICHELLE

She must have it in her car.

SHEILA

We'll pack some for you when she comes back. I'll even drop them by on my way home.

BRIDGET

Great. This was nice, Michelle, thanks a lot.

MELISSA

Thanks, Michelle. I didn't mean anything by that before. I was totally kidding.

MICHELLE

Oh God, I know that! But it's late anyway. I'll see you guys this week sometime.

As they move to the door, FRAN enters, snow in her hair, knocking as she opens the door.

FRAN

Hey! Looks like everybody's still here. Great! I could use a cup of coffee. It's cold all the sudden! And it's starting to come down!

SHEILA

(looking to escape) I'll get that coffee for you, Fran!

SHEILA exits to kitchen, MELISSA and BRIDGET take their coats off and set their boxes down.

BRIDGET

We were about to leave, but we can hold off a few minutes, til we get our share of the black and whites!

FRAN

You guys didn't get yours? How come?

MELISSA

The box we had here only had a few dozen in it. We figured there must be a second box.

FRAN

What? I could swear I brought a full box in. (*A moment of thought*) I had three boxes all together. You know? Let me run out to my car and see what's in there.

She exits, SHEILA returns with coffee.

SHEILA

Where did she go?

MICHELLE

She thinks she may have left a box of cookies in her car.

SHEILA

Really?!?

MICHELLE

Yes.

JUDY

Now, that's what we thought all along!

SHEILA

Yes. That is what we thought all along.

MICHELLE

Exactly what we thought.

FRAN returns with a box of cookies.

FRAN

Here we go! Boy, am I a goofball! I can't believe I left these in the car. (*Everyone grabs her cookie box and FRAN doles out the cookies*) Huh. I'm glad you all hadn't wrapped things up yet. I was afraid I'd swing back and find an empty house and a locked door.

JUDY

Even if everyone had left, Michelle would be here.

FRAN

Oh, right. Of course Michelle would be here. But I figured she might be in bed or something. She might not answer the door. You never know!

MICHELLE

Fran, these cookies look great!

JUDY

They are certainly black and white.

FRAN

More like black and tan. I think I overcooked them a smidgen.

MELISSA

Oooh, black and tan sounds good. *(To BRIDGET)* Wanna go to Reilly's after we leave here?

MICHELLE

You're still going to leave?

BRIDGET

I thought you wanted us to go.

MICHELLE

I don't care if you stay.

SHEILA

How was work, Fran?

FRAN

Oh, I'm still there. Not really on the clock or anything. I'm taking an early break, I guess. It was fine though. So far it's going fine.

TRISH

You like being a cop?

FRAN

Around here I do. I feel protective of this place.

TRISH

Are there a lot of women cops here?

FRAN

No, actually. I'm one of three, I think. And none of us are partnered together.

BRIDGET

Why not?

FRAN

I don't know. Just the way it shook out, I guess.

KEN

(Entering, with trepidation) The way what shook out?

FRAN

Ken?!?

KEN

Hey, Fran, I didn't see you here before.

FRAN

No. I wasn't here. I mean, I just got back. I was here earlier and had to go to work but now I'm on a break and I came back for my cookies.

KEN

Great. You know, I was really surprised to see everybody here when I walked in . . . Judy, Bridget and Melissa *(to TRISH, falsely)* I'm sorry, your name again?

TRISH

Trish.

KEN

Oh, that's right.

MICHELLE

Ken, I knew you were going to be out of town. I throw this party every year. I didn't think you'd really be that interested in something that was going to happen while you were away.

MELISSA

You wouldn't believe the things that go on in my house while Tim's out of town.

BRIDGET

You can find out for a \$50 buy-in.

MELISSA

Shut up, please.

FRAN

Walking into a house full of people after a stressful trip might have thrown you off, Ken. I can understand that.

KEN

In fact, I was under the impression that you were going to be over at your sister's, Michelle.

MICHELLE

Oh. How could I throw this party here if I was over at my sister's?

KEN

You're not over there?

MICHELLE

Obviously not. I'm here. Throwing a party.

JUDY

What's going on with your sister, Michelle?

MICHELLE

Well, Judy, (*a pause, concocting*) this shouldn't really leave the party, (*pause*) but she's having a tough time with her boyfriend. He's kind of a creep, can't stop looking at other women, you know? She gave him an ultimatum and he turned her down.

KEN

And now she can't come to grips with it.

JUDY

That's too bad.

MICHELLE

You know, Judy? It might not be the worst thing. The guy has started to seem like a real jerk. She might be a lot better off without him.

KEN

I doubt that. I think that he's probably the best she'll ever get.

MICHELLE

If that were true, she might as well call it a day.

KEN

If she can't appreciate him for what he brings to the table, that might be for the best.

MICHELLE

What exactly does he bring to the table? A hangover and the threat of STDs!?!?

BRIDGET

Yoo hoo! We're all still listening!

JUDY

It's sweet of you to want to help your sister, Michelle.

MICHELLE

I'm going to warm up my coffee.

SHEILA

I took the last cup.

MICHELLE

I'll put on another pot then.

MELISSA

All right, we're going to head out.

MICHELLE

Okay. Thanks for coming you guys.

(Exits into kitchen. MELISSA and BRIDGET ready themselves to leave)

JUDY

And you girls are going home?

BRIDGET

We are headed out for a quick beer, actually.

MELISSA

Probably. But we have to walk home to get the car.

BRIDGET

Yes. Before we go out drinking, we need to grab the car.

JUDY

Do you have your basket finished for the Women's Club Raffle, Melissa?

MELISSA

Oh, God, Judy! I meant to bring it tonight and give it to you. It's sitting by my front door.

JUDY

I'll walk to the corner, if you'll have Tim or one of the kids run it down to me.

BRIDGET

That's fine, Judy, but bundle up!

TRISH

Are you almost ready to go, Judy? My stomach hurts a bit.

JUDY

Oh, sure! Let me grab this basket, then we'll toddle on home!

FRAN

It's so cold—I'll go to the corner for you, Judy. Give me your car keys.

JUDY

That's okay. My back seat's a mess. If you go get the basket, Fran, I'll clear a spot for it in the car.

JUDY, FRAN, BRIDGET and MELISSA exit.

KEN

Sheila, can I talk to you for a second, maybe outside?

SHEILA

Absolutely not.

KEN

Inside?

SHEILA

Go to hell.

KEN

But she's crazy—

SHEILA

I have no idea what you're talking about. I'm going to see if Michelle needs help.

SHEILA exits to kitchen. TRISH and KEN alone.

TRISH

Listen, just please don't talk to me. I am going to get out of here as fast as I can. I'd be gone already, but I didn't drive myself.

KEN

This is like fate.

TRISH

Fate that I find out that you're married!

KEN

No! Fate that brought us back together!

TRISH
We're not together.

KEN
We kind of are.

TRISH
We're just in the same room.

KEN
We can fix this. I'll come by the bar on Tuesday.

TRISH
Don't.

KEN
Why not?.

TRISH
Because I don't want to see you. You have a wife?!? You said you weren't married!

KEN
I never said I'd never been married! We're separated!

TRISH
She's here. In this house. And so are you! No wonder you'd never bring me here!

KEN
I didn't bring you here because I don't like to get things all mixed up. I like my life compartmentalized.

TRISH
Which is why I stopped seeing you!

KEN
Then why are you in my house right now?

TRISH
I got invited to a party. I said yes. Judy's not my new BFF, but she asked me to come here—I thought I might make some friends!

KEN
You don't need friends—you have me!

TRISH
You don't invite me anywhere! Judy at least invited me here—

KEN

To my house!

TRISH

To your wife's party! Judy didn't happen to mention that the hostess' husband is my ex-boyfriend.

KEN

Don't say ex. And she doesn't even live here!

TRISH

Judy?

KEN

Michelle!

TRISH

What?

KEN

I'm telling you she doesn't live here anymore! Don't you see? She's doing this to save face with the neighbors! She thought I'd be out of town.

TRISH

I'm sure she broke into your house to have a cookie exchange.

KEN

She must have! I changed the locks! But look—now we have a chance to fix what went wrong!

TRISH

What went wrong is that you've been married for years and years!

KEN

Not years and years. Not even a decade!

MICHELLE

(entering, with coffee) Nobody's back yet?

KEN

No.

MICHELLE

Wonder what's keeping them. I'm really ready to close up shop here. *(looks outside, then slightly concerned)* The wind is blowing Judy all over the place!

MICHELLE grabs a jacket and exits.

KEN

Things were good.

TRISH

Things were awful.

KEN

We were just getting started. Then I got shut out for no reason!

TRISH

Right.

KEN

Let's back up a bit.

TRISH

No.

KEN

Trish, c'mon.

TRISH

Quit it.

KEN

Seriously

He approaches TRISH, she keeps him at arm's length.

TRISH

I will punch you in the face.

KEN

Easy! *(crossing to bar, pouring himself a large drink, which he consumes and refills until his final exit)* You're such a little firecracker.

TRISH

As soon as Judy gets back in here, I'm telling her I puked and we have to go. Then you and your wife can sit around and snuggle.

KEN

Ex-wife, sweetheart. We're separated. I really don't want you to think I'm a cheater.

TRISH

Are you divorced?

KEN

We will be. We are *seriously* separated. She doesn't live here. I'm free to . . . date.

TRISH

You were never dating me, Ken. Dating is when you talk to each other, eat meals and go to events together.

KEN

We'll do all that, I swear.

TRISH

I broke up with you because you stopped being nice to me. You came to the bar and drank for free til my shift was over, then waited for me in my car and after we were finished, you went home.

KEN

I'm tired. You work a really late shift. I have a really stressful job.

TRISH

And a really real wife.

KEN

C'mon.

TRISH

I thought you were too married to your work, and it turns out you're just too married!

KEN

We're having some really big problems.

TRISH

I know.

KEN

They can't be fixed.

TRISH

That's why I broke up with you!

KEN

Oh God! I'm talking about Michelle and me—we're having really big problems.

TRISH

I'm sure sleeping with me helped make everything okay at home.

KEN

You were my escape from that. You are, you are my escape from Michelle.

TRISH

She's crazy.

KEN

I know.

TRISH

These people don't really like her.

KEN

I know.

TRISH

And they really don't like you.

KEN

What the hell are you talking about?

TRISH

These women, at this little cookie party. They all hate you.

KEN

Well, Fran might be a little upset with me. I had to tell her everything.

TRISH

Why?

KEN

Because I asked her to drive by the house while I was out of town to make sure everything was okay. I asked her to check on the dog.

TRISH

Fran? The cop?

KEN

Yeah.

TRISH

What about those other girls? From down the street?

KEN

Melissa and Bridget? Shit, I'd never say a word to them. It'd be all over the subdivision in minutes.

TRISH

They've got your number.

KEN

What?!?

TRISH

They're being, like, really bitchy.

KEN

Oh God, they're always like that. Those two became best friends in second grade, promised to marry brothers, buy houses next door to each other, have kids at the same time—and then they actually did it.

TRISH

They've got you figured out.

KEN

Bullshit. Michelle wouldn't tell anybody. Neither would I.

TRISH

Well, you told Fran. And me.

KEN

I told you because I was trying to fast forward things. You wouldn't have gotten together with me, if you thought I was still married!

TRISH

You are married.

KEN

Barely!

TRISH

People aren't married in degrees.

KEN

I thought we had something going. (*TRISH laughs*) No, I did. Did you even know I bought a dog? A dog just like yours that died. Because you said you loved yours so much.

Scotch Tape?
TRISH

I got a dog just like that. A little terrier. For you. And then you stop talking to me.
KEN

Well, where is it?
TRISH

Here.
KEN

There's no dog here.
TRISH

Yeah there is.
KEN

I haven't seen a dog all night. Or heard one.
TRISH

Where else would he be?
KEN

TRISH shrugs as MICHELLE enters, KEN is suddenly awkward, as if caught.

MICHELLE
All right, Judy's out there waiting for Fran. God, if she fell and broke her hip at my party—I can't even think about how bad I'd feel.

KEN
Trish, would you mind giving Michelle and me a moment?

TRISH
I don't feel good. I'm going to tell Judy we have to go.

MICHELLE
You didn't eat one of the black and whites, did you?

TRISH
No. (*angry, sad, to KEN*) It was really nice to meet you.

KEN
Yes, you too. (*a wink and an "okay" sign at TRISH*) See you around!

TRISH exits.

MICHELLE

I already know what you're going to say. I know I'm not supposed to be here, blah, blah, blah . . . but how do you expect—

KEN

Hey, where's my dog?

MICHELLE

Your what?

KEN

My dog. I bought a dog.

MICHELLE

You did? Why?

KEN

Because (*pause*) I wanted one. And the reason we never got one is that you say you're allergic (*lie*) and that you are afraid of dogs since you got bit when you were little (*lie*). And since you've moved out, I went and got a dog.

MICHELLE

I didn't move out. I went out. And you wouldn't let me back in.

KEN

You stormed out.

MICHELLE

Whatever.

KEN

You said, "I'm never coming back to this hellhole."

MICHELLE

Well, here I am.

KEN

At least I brought your stuff to your sister's.

MICHELLE

At least. (*pause*) What kind of dog was it?

KEN

It's a terrier. Just a little guy.

MICHELLE
What was its name?

KEN
His name is Scotch Tape II.

MICHELLE
I'm sorry?

KEN
Scotch Tape II.

MICHELLE
Was there a Scotch Tape I?

KEN
Obviously, there's the tape. The actual tape is the first scotch tape. He's a Scottish terrier. I named him after the tape.

MICHELLE
Which isn't from Scotland.

KEN
I don't care.

MICHELLE
Why didn't you name him Macbeth? He's a Scot.

KEN
Yeah, and his wife's a psycho. Come to think of it, that would've been perfect.

MICHELLE
Funny.

KEN
What?

MICHELLE
You named your dog after something sticky and cheap, two of your favorite qualities.

KEN
Oh, you know? Shut up! You think you need everything so fancy! Fancy couch, fancy party, fancy food that poisoned my father!

MICHELLE

Don't forget I almost poisoned you too.

KEN

I've never forgotten that.

MICHELLE

You just watch what you eat in this house, cranberry boy.

KEN

This is my house! I buy the groceries now, because I live here alone, with my dog, Scotch Tape II!

MICHELLE

You used to.

KEN

I what?

MICHELLE

You used to live here with your dog.

KEN

The house is in my name. Only. You think you're going to evict me? Fat chance.

MICHELLE

Hardly. You can stay here, but you'll stay here alone. I killed your dog.

All at once SHEILA, JUDY, TRISH and FRAN enter.

Ladies! I guess it's about that time, isn't it?

JUDY

Oh, we're going to hustle out now—Trish isn't feeling too good. Michelle, it's been such a nice evening, Michelle. And Ken, so nice to see you.

KEN

What's that? Oh, yes, Judy. Nice to see you. Merry Christmas, again.

JUDY

(as she is closing her box of cookies) Now let's see. I've got all the cookies in here, right? We got the black and whites, finally, right?

SHEILA

You've got them, Judy. Merry Christmas.

JUDY

Goodbye, all. Happy New Year, if I don't see you! Ready, Trish?

TRISH

Absolutely. Thanks.

(An ad libbed goodbye as JUDY and TRISH exit)

FRAN

I should be getting back to work as well.

KEN

Hey, Frannie. Thanks for everything while I was out of town.

MICHELLE

Excuse me?

KEN

I was speaking to Fran.

MICHELLE

You were speaking to Fran in front of a room full of people.

KEN

I asked Fran to do me a favor. She did it. I said thanks.

FRAN

No big deal.

MICHELLE

What was the favor?

KEN

Leave it alone, Michelle.

MICHELLE

Why don't you want to tell me?

KEN

Because it's none of your business.

MICHELLE

Everything that goes on here is my business.

KEN

Not any—

BRIDGET and MELISSA explode through the door laughing.

MELISSA

Little Miss Drinks a Lot here, she just wiped out! Right on her ass!

BRIDGET

It was black ice! Hello! Black ice! I could've gotten really hurt! You need to salt your sidewalk better, Melissa!

MELISSA

I wish we had one of those crime cameras mounted up on the light pole, then Bob Saget would be handing me a million bucks.

FRAN

I don't think he hosts that show anymore.

MELISSA

Well whoever does host it would be handing me a million bucks.

MICHELLE

That show isn't on anymore.

MELISSA

Oh, who gives a shit!!! I'm just trying to tell you that it was hilarious!!!!

SHEILA

You came back here to tell us that Bridget fell and that it was hilarious?

BRIDGET

No. I dropped my cookies, the box opened and they slid down the driveway.

MELISSA

Yeah, way to fold 'em, Judy.

MICHELLE

Judy isn't even here.

BRIDGET

Ha!

MELISSA

At least I still have cookies.

BRIDGET

Yes, I tossed my cookies.

MELISSA and BRIDGET laugh wildly at this.

MICHELLE

There's plenty left over, as you know. Do you just want another box?

BRIDGET

Swell. That'd be swell.

KEN

You girls all right?

MELISSA

A-okay, Malibu Ken.

BRIDGET

He's more like Sport and Shave Ken, you remember him?

MELISSA

He came with a little beard marker.

SHEILA

And a sponge razor. And you drew a little beard on him, and then shaved it off.

MELISSA

On my Sport and Shave Ken, I drew pubic hair.

BRIDGET

Yes you did. Like a Sasquatch. Ken, do you shave down there?

KEN

Okay, that's enough ladies. It's time for you to wrap it up. Bye bye. Look out for the black ice. Or don't.

MICHELLE

Ken, you don't need to scold my guests.

KEN

Michelle, get these girls out of my house.

MICHELLE

They are my guests, in my home.

KEN

Like hell they are! This is my house! You didn't buy the groceries! You didn't pick out the new area rug in the office! And you didn't get to name the dog!

MICHELLE

You bought a rug?

SHEILA

Oh God. You have a dog?

KEN

I do.

MICHELLE

You did.

KEN

I just got it.

MICHELLE

I just killed it.

FRAN

What?

BRIDGET

You killed that little terrier?

MICHELLE

You knew about his dog?

MELISSA

We saw it in the yard a few weeks ago.

BRIDGET

I figured it was somewhere locked up for the night, you know, for the party.

MICHELLE

You just left it here while you went away?

KEN

I left the garage heat on, and I set it up so he could get into the yard and back into the garage and the laundry room. Didn't you notice the little doggie door I built?

MICHELLE

You built something?

KEN

Well, I paid a guy to build it. So he was all set up. In and out, in and out.

MICHELLE

Who leaves a dog alone for days?

KEN

Fran was checking on him.

MICHELLE

You knew about the dog?

FRAN

Yes.

MICHELLE

What?!? This is ridiculous. You should've told me you had a dog.

KEN

Gee, Michelle, why would you not know if there was a dog in your own house? I'll tell you why, ladies—because she doesn't live here!

MICHELLE

Where's the gasp of surprise?

FRAN

I already knew, because Ken asked me to check on the house, that no one would be staying here over the weekend. I'd heard you were having trouble and Ken told me you were staying at your sister's.

SHEILA

I knew because you told me.

MICHELLE

Oh, that's right.

BRIDGET

We knew because your bathroom light hasn't been turned on in weeks.

MELISSA

And because your little crystal snowman collection didn't get put into your window til today.

BRIDGET

You always put that out early.

Sometimes too early. MELISSA

Thanksgiving is too early. BRIDGET

Good to know the neighborhood watch program is up and running. Too bad it couldn't save Scotch Tape II. MICHELLE

Who? SHEILA

Ken's dog. MICHELLE

Its name was Scotch Tape? BRIDGET

Two? MELISSA

Who was the first? BRIDGET

The actual tape. Stupid, huh? MICHELLE

No. KEN

Yes. MICHELLE

No. KEN

Yes. MICHELLE

No. KEN

Yes. MICHELLE

SHEILA
Stop! Ken, your dog is dead.

KEN
Seriously?

SHEILA
Yes.

KEN
Shit. *(a moment of grief, then sudden anger at MICHELLE)* You killed my dog.

MICHELLE
Somewhat inadvertently, but yes I did.

KEN
You did this to get back at me.

MICHELLE
For . . . ?

KEN
For having an affair!

TRISH enters, abruptly.

TRISH
I left my purse on the—

KEN
(pause) I had an affair!

TRISH
Oh no.

KEN
(grabs TRISH) With her!

TRISH
Please let go of me!

KEN
We did it. Several times.

MICHELLE
You did?

TRISH
Let go of me, Ken.

MELISSA
Was it in an alley?

BRIDGET
Upside down?

TRISH
No.

KEN
It was neither of those things, but it was excellent.

TRISH
I'd like to leave now.

MELISSA
Are you kidding me?

MICHELLE
Ken, this is kind of pathetic. She's obviously disgusted by you.

KEN
We're just having a small problem right now, but we've been going strong for over a month.

MICHELLE
Why did you have an affair?

KEN
It started because you bought all that furniture and I was super pissed. I went out and I tied one on. I couldn't get over how stupid you are. But, then I stopped caring, because I got together with Trish.

BRIDGET
You had revenge sex against Michelle because she spent money?

MELISSA
That's a little pitiful.

MICHELLE

This is making me sick.

SHEILA

Michelle, it's okay. Everybody knows already.

KEN

Knows what?

BRIDGET and MELISSA

That you sleep around.

KEN

Stop it.

BRIDGET and MELISSA

Stop what?

KEN

Talking together. Knock it off.

BRIDGET and MELISSA

Okay. Sorry.

KEN

So it's all out in the open now. I'm in love with another woman. She loves me. (*an "UGH!" from TRISH*) Well, she did a few weeks ago and she soon will again!

TRISH

Just so you all know, he said he wasn't married. I figured there's no way you could be married. You're at my bar, like, all the time.

SHEILA

Trish, you tend bar?

TRISH

Um, I do. But I'm in school to get my –

BRIDGET

God! I knew I knew you from somewhere. Three Cheers, right?

MELISSA

Oh yeah! Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Now I've placed you.

MICHELLE

Where's Three Cheers?

BRIDGET

You know it! It's that little pub down the block from Ken's – oh.

MELISSA

And it all falls into place.

FRAN

Okay. Maybe we should leave, you guys.

BRIDGET

Are you kidding? This is awesome.

MELISSA

Everybody knew, anyway.

MICHELLE

(stunned) You're really having an affair . . .

TRISH

The affair is over. I broke up with him.

KEN

Trish, you and I are getting back together. Michelle, I'm not going to feel bad about moving on.

MICHELLE

. . . with a *bartender*? I guess I can honestly say I wouldn't have expected that. My husband is tapping the keg girl.

TRISH

Not anymore.

MICHELLE

(no response, now moving between distress and vindictiveness) You know, I don't know if I could think of anything more tacky. Have an affair with a beautiful intern. Have an affair with a brilliant colleague! But a bartender from the place down the block?!?

KEN

Michelle, you don't have to be crass.

MELISSA

I disagree.

BRIDGET

I think she should be crass. Go for it, Michelle.

MICHELLE

Okay, I will. Did your eyes meet one day when she set your Monte Cristo deluxe down on your table? Did you think, “Wow! After I eat this sandwich, I think I’ll bang the waitress?”

TRISH

Um, I’m a bartender.

BRIDGET

That’s so much better . . .

MELISSA

. . . than a waitress.

MICHELLE

Right, a bartender. So it wasn’t a sandwich she delivered to you, but cocktail after cocktail . . . and when you were good and loaded, you thought, “This girl is all right! She’s meeting my every need. I bet I can get her to do it with me.”

TRISH

That’s not how it was. He was really nice at the—

FRAN

Trish, it might be better if you left.

MICHELLE

She’s not going anywhere. So you said, “Hey, bartender lady, I’m a big attorney! Let’s get it on!” And she was like, “That sounds great, even though I’m engaged to be married, I’m looking to trade up.”

KEN

That’s not it, Michelle.

MICHELLE

Trish what does your fiancé do?

TRISH

He’s a high school counselor.

MICHELLE

Aha!

BRIDGET

A trade up it was.

MELISSA

From a Pinto to a Hummer.

BRIDGET

A hummer indeed.

MICHELLE

Ken, did you think she liked you? You're not nice. And you're not funny. But you have money, Ken. It's in the clothes you wear, the phone you talk on, the drinks you order—I bet he ordered a gin and tonic made with Tanqueray 10, didn't he?

TRISH

That's what he always—

SHEILA

Did he tip well, Trish?

TRISH

He stopped tipping me after we first got together.

KEN

I tip strangers very well.

MICHELLE

Because you need everybody to know that you have money.

KEN

Michelle, maybe you should go back to your sister's for the night.

SHEILA

Are you kidding me?

KEN

I don't think you should stay here.

SHEILA

(*To KEN*) I don't think, **you** should stay here.

MICHELLE

Sheila's right. You should leave. Take an early flight to your next meeting. Go stay at Trish's.

TRISH

Oh, that won't work. My fiancé—

KEN

She's not serious, Trish.

BRIDGET

One question, before you go. How did you afford a house here on a high school counselor's salary?

TRISH

(taking up her box of cookies) We hit it big on an Internet stock.

MELISSA

Whores dot com?

BRIDGET

Adultery dot org?

TRISH

Okay, enough. I'm just gonna take off. *(Goes to leave)*

MICHELLE

Wait! She can't have those cookies.

SHEILA

Absolutely not.

BRIDGET

Yeah. Put the box down, www dot super slut dot net.

MELISSA

That was a good one.

KEN

Enough. You two get out of here.

BRIDGET

Fine. Jerk-Ass.

MELISSA

That's Mr. Jerk-Ass to you.

BRIDGET

See you, Michelle.

MICHELLE

Don't fall down again.

MELISSA

We're gonna cut through the backyards.

BRIDGET

Yeah, flip fences.

SHEILA

Well, look out for the dead dog.

MELISSA

Will do!

*BRIDGET and MELISSA exit through the kitchen to the back door.
Simultaneously, JUDY enters through front door.*

JUDY

Trish, did you get lost in here? I've been beeping! (*silence*) Trish?

TRISH

Sorry, Judy.

JUDY

Well, let's get going. It's late!

MICHELLE

Before you leave, Judy, let me catch you up—my husband Ken had an affair with your delightful new neighbor.

JUDY

What?!?

FRAN

It's true, Judy.

JUDY

Oh, Ken. Trish? This is awful.

KEN

Judy, you don't know the whole story.

JUDY

And I don't want to know it! Listen here, Miss Trish, tummy ache or not, as far as I'm concerned, you can walk home!

BRIDGET and MELISSA reenter as if from backyard, standing close together, somehow concealing something.

MELISSA

We totally forgot our cookies. Duh!

JUDY

Well I'm glad you're back, because I would like to announce to all of you that Trish did not pay full price for those brownies! I saw the receipt and they were on CLEARANCE!

An audible gasp from the women, JUDY takes TRISH'S cookie box from her arms.

You don't get these. You have to be nice to get the cookies! *(she opens the box and looks inside)* If you ladies examine the brownies closely, you may discover they make better weapons than snacks!

JUDY pelts TRISH with a brownie. TRISH, caught off guard but not injured, glares.

TRISH

Ow! *(pause and big breath)* Michelle, I apologize. I feel awful. I hooked up with your husband. I have since broken up with him. And I didn't know he was married.

MICHELLE

But you're engaged.

TRISH

We're starting to think it might not stick.

SHEILA

Really, why's that?

MELISSA

Yeah, genius, why's that?

TRISH

You know, not to be a bitch, but what took Michelle nine years to figure out about Ken, only took me six weeks.

BRIDGET

So you're the Albert frickin' Einstein of the skank set. Bully for you.

SHEILA

You have no right to say that, Trish.

TRISH

I have no right to say anything, right now. But a woman with any kind of balls wouldn't take this guy's shit for more than a minute.

MICHELLE

Shut up! *(she pelts TRISH with a brownie)*

KEN

Jesus, Michelle!

MICHELLE

Ken, shut the hell up!

MICHELLE pelts KEN with a brownie. The women move to their boxes and begin pelting both KEN and TRISH with brownies.

TRISH

I'm sorry. Whatever you all think of me, fine. But Michelle, you're crazy and you're weak and your husband's a creep!

MICHELLE

Ex-husband.

KEN

(moving toward the door) This is ridiculous! Fran, can you do something, please?

FRAN

Yes, Ken. I'll charge them all with assault with a deadly bakery good. Just go.

KEN

Michelle, I'm coming back tomorrow and you'd better not be here.

MICHELLE

Oh, I'll be here, Ken. I want to watch you bury your dog!!

BRIDGET

Better yet— take it with you!

MELISSA heaves the frozen carcass of SCOTCH TAPE II at KEN, who catches it awkwardly, and then swats it in the direction of TRISH who bobbles it before letting it fall as she exits. Perhaps it gets kicked, jumped over, tripped on, before coming to rest.

KEN

This is sick! You actually murdered my dog! You did this on purpose! Murderer!

SHEILA

She didn't even do it, Ken. I did. Next time put your pet in a kennel when you're going out of town for days!

KEN

Sheila! I thought you and I were on good terms!

SHEILA

You were mistaken.

KEN

(to BRIDGET and MELISSA) And you two . . . you two are disgusting! You pick up a dead dog . . . a frozen dead dog . . . for what?

MELISSA

We prefer to think of it as a pup-sicle!

KEN

That's gross! I've had more than enough of all this. Michelle, expect to hear from me. Sooner instead of later.

BRIDGET

(kicking SCOTCH TAPE II to KEN) Don't forget your little pal!

KEN grabs SCOTCH TAPE II and leaves by the front door.

SHEILA

Well that was really something.

FRAN

Indeed it was. Everybody okay? Judy?

JUDY

I'm a little wound up, but I'll take my time getting home. Michelle, I'm so sorry about all of this.

MICHELLE

None of it is your fault, Judy.

JUDY

But they were mean to you, and nobody needs this kind of sadness. I'm going to check on you next week, okay?

MICHELLE

That's fine, Judy. Thanks.

JUDY exits.

BRIDGET

Are you okay, Michelle?

MICHELLE

No.

SHEILA

But you're no worse off than you were before the party started.

MICHELLE

I'm not?

BRIDGET

This is the most fun we've ever had here. And, besides, Sheila's right. Everyone already knew.

MELISSA

All that's different is that now you know that everyone knows.

MICHELLE

That's a big difference.

MELISSA

Still.

BRIDGET

Hey, we didn't bust you on the ruined couch, and we're forgiving you for killing Ken's dog. I think we can stick by you through this.

MICHELLE

Thanks. And thanks for coming. Are you guys going out?

MELISSA

Yeah. Want to come?

MICHELLE

Not tonight. Maybe someday. But have fun.

BRIDGET

We just need to wind down after this little escapade.

BRIDGET, and MELISSA leave with ad libbed goodbyes.

SHEILA

You don't have to keep up the front anymore. It's actually better.

MICHELLE

It doesn't feel better. Everything I thought Ken was—he actually is!

FRAN

It will get better. I've been there. It really will. *(Pause)* Ken's dog died?

MICHELLE

Yes.

FRAN

How did that happen?

SHEILA

Well . . .

FRAN

Did my cookies kill it?

SHEILA

They did. Either the chocolate or the sharp edges.

FRAN

I wondered what had happened to the cookies. I had that extra box in my car to drop at Jimmy's school tomorrow for their holiday party, so I just brought it in.

MICHELLE

I was frantic at the beginning of the party, and I upended a whole bottle of red wine right into the box. *(pause)* No I didn't. *(pause)* I threw them out because I knew they wouldn't be good. I threw them outside. I'm sorry.

SHEILA

I threw them out, actually.

MICHELLE

But I made you do it. I'm sorry. To both of you.

FRAN

It's okay. You were right. They weren't good. I tried one.

MICHELLE

I still feel bad.

FRAN

I felt bad bringing them. Maybe next year I can bring a few bottles of wine or something.

MICHELLE

That might be better. Everyone ended up with your cookies anyway.

SHEILA

But now you don't have any for the school thing.

FRAN

That's all right. I'll stop at the store.

MICHELLE

Or you could take some of the extras. (*Stacking a second box on top of the one FRAN already has*) Just pick out the ones you want.

FRAN

That's a better plan. Okay. I'm gonna go. Michelle, let me know if there's anything you need. I mean it.

MICHELLE

Thanks.

FRAN

Don't wake up tomorrow and think I didn't mean it. I do. Call me anytime.

FRAN exits.

SHEILA

Do you want to clean?

MICHELLE

Am I weak?

SHEILA

What?

MICHELLE

Trish called me weak. Am I weak?

SHEILA

I don't think so.

MICHELLE

Then what am I?

SHEILA

You're not a quitter. You keep trying to make it right until the last possible second.

MICHELLE

(considering) Okay then, let's clean up.

SHEILA

(raising a glass) Hey wait. To a party that will go down in history, and to the hostess who made it happen.

MICHELLE half laughs, raises a glass and sips. Lights fade on MICHELLE and SHEILA beginning the post-party clean up.

END OF PLAY