

FRESH CUT

a full-length play

by

Rhett Martinez

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2618 Baylor Street
Houston, TX 77009
718-915-1374
rhettmartinez@mac.com

CHARACTERS

Vivian Cleeves: A pretty lady (20s-30s) who works diligently to see that her pretty little world remains pretty at all times.

Devlin Cleeves: A handsome gentleman (20s-30s) who works diligently to fit into his wife's pretty little world.

The Specialist: A shadowy purveyor of black-market children. (May be played by a man or a woman of any age, say, 20s-60s.)

THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

The world looks and feels as if it is London in the 1920s, but it is not. The house and all its furnishings are of the art-deco era. Vivian and Devlin dress in finery and look as if they have just stepped off the silver screen and landed in their own Noel Coward play. Yet the phone is contemporary, electronic. The Specialist uses the latest technology for his/her presentation. Perhaps the characters even sound as if they're in a Noel Coward play, without the British Received Pronunciation, of course. This is America. Present day. A pretty, little bubble tucked away inside our ugly world.

ACT I

A house in town. A lovely, dapper home. Not wealthy, but quite comfortable. Well tended. A flower garden is seen outside. Nothing of any use grows there. Just pretty flowers.

A couple of visible rooms: a living room, a breakfast nook. A rolling bar with the necessities for cocktail hour.

VIVIAN, elegantly dressed, is enjoying tea at the table. All is lovely and pretty: tea service accoutrements, table, chairs, window, door, vase.

DEVLIN enters in a sour mood. Dark, elegant suit, bowler hat. He halts in the doorway, regards Vivian sourly. Vivian is oblivious. Devlin moves to the table and plops a fistful of flowers into the vase.

VIVIAN

Oh darling, how lovely!

She arranges the flowers. Devlin sits.

VIVIAN

What a thoughtful man you are. To bring me flowers. So thoughtful. So charming. Here, let me take your hat and get you a drink.

She does so.

VIVIAN

What shall I get you darling, the usual?

DEVLIN

The usual. As usual.

VIVIAN

Just as I predicted, darling. I knew precisely when you would be coming and precisely what you would be wanting so I have a chilled martini waiting...*(presents him with the drink)*...for you.

DEVLIN

(taking the drink)

I am nothing if not predictable.

VIVIAN

Oh don't be silly, darling, what about the flowers? Hmm? I could not possibly have predicted those, could I?

DEVLIN

I bring you flowers every day.

VIVIAN

Do you?

DEVLIN

Yes.

VIVIAN

No.

DEVLIN

Every day.

VIVIAN

No.

DEVLIN

Yes.

Vivian considers.

VIVIAN

Well if you do it's only because you're the most thoughtful, charming man a wife could ever have. Let's freshen up that drink for you, shall we? (*She does so.*) How was your day, my love?

DEVLIN

The same.

VIVIAN

Isn't that wonderful? Shall I tell you about my day? (*Devlin winces.*) Would you like to know how I spent my day? Hmm? Well, I'll tell you. I spent the better part of my day making a list. "A list of what," you might ask.

Pause.

DEVLIN

A list of what?

VIVIAN

A list of baby names!

Devlin is alarmed.

DEVLIN

A list of what?

VIVIAN

A list of baby names!

DEVLIN

Why? Are you...? Are we...?

VIVIAN

Oh, darling, no. (*Devlin is relieved. Vivian continues, sincerely.*) How sweet you are to be so disappointed. No darling, not yet. But we shall keep trying! I have been reading a book for women who are having difficulty...(*she cannot bring herself to say the words "getting pregnant" so she leaves it at:*)...who are having difficulty. After reading this book, I believe we might benefit from deciding on a name.

DEVLIN

A name?

VIVIAN

Yes! It's a technique called Positive Ovulation! According to the doctor who wrote the book the trick is to be positive! Think positive thoughts! While ovulating! Positive Ovulation! The most crucial factor in maintaining a positive mind while ovulating is to be focused. *Fixed! Determined! Focused! Fixed!* Imagine your baby in your womb! Lock on it! Feel it!

See it! Hold it there! In your mind! *Fixed! Determined! Focused! Fixed!* That's what I've been thinking about, you see, while we've been...whenever we've been...*(She cannot bring herself to say the words "having sex" so she leaves it at:)*...*trying*. I see our future baby in my mind's eye and I lock on it! I focus everything right on that little perfect baby face and I clutch my fingers around that little perfect baby head and squeeze it with everything I've got!

DEVLIN

That's what you're thinking when we're making love?

VIVIAN

Yes! But what I asked myself today was, "Why isn't it working?" We've been...*trying*...for so long now and it isn't working. It just is not working! But why? That's what I asked myself. "Why?" And do you know how I answered? I was surprised by how I answered myself. To myself. As no doubt you will be too. I answered, "What's your baby's name?" Hmm? Yes. Hmm. And then do you know how I answered this second question I had asked of myself in response to the first question to myself? Hmm? I answered: "I don't know." Hmm? "I don't know." Yes! And then I *did* know! *That's* the problem! *I don't know my future baby's name!* That's the problem! And that's the answer! Isn't that wonderful!

DEVLIN

That's absurd.

Pause.

VIVIAN

It is not absurd.

DEVLIN

It's the most absurd thing I've ever heard.

VIVIAN

(with venom)

Don't be ugly, Devlin. You know how I cannot stand your being ugly.

Pause.

DEVLIN

(with fear)

I'm sorry. That was...ugly. I am truly sorry.

Pause. Vivian is jubilant again.

VIVIAN

Shall I tell you the names? Hmm? The names I've come up with for the future baby?

DEVLIN
*(surrendering to the
 inevitable)*

Please do.

Vivian fetches her list and pencil.

VIVIAN
 Well, naturally, I first had to decide whether I want to have a boy or a girl. If I am to remain *fixed! determined! focused! fixed!* then surely I must know if I am having a boy or a girl. So I decided that I am having a girl.

DEVLIN
(disappointed; whining)

A girl?

VIVIAN
 Yes! Isn't that wonderful! Now, I've got several names here and I need your opinion on which is best. Shall I begin? Hmm? Yes! *(She takes stage to present the names. She offers each with reverent formality.)* Alexandra...*(She searches for some reaction from Devlin. Receiving none, she continues.)* Katherine...*(As before.)* Isabelle...*(As before.)* Guennivere... *(As before.)* Perrywinkle...*(A reaction from Devlin of slight disgust. Vivian mistakes it and so proceeds enthusiastically.)* Honeysuckle...! *(As before with greater disgust and greater enthusiasm.)* Butterblossom...! *(Extreme disgust, extreme enthusiasm.)* Butterblossom? Butterblossom! Butterblossom!

DEVLIN
 Stop!

VIVIAN
(tearing with triumph)
 It is decided. Future Baby shall be named Butterblossom.

DEVLIN
 No!

VIVIAN
(shocked)
 No?

DEVLIN
 No!

VIVIAN
 You don't like Butterblossom?

DEVLIN
 It's awful!

VIVIAN
It isn't!

DEVLIN
It's horrendous!

VIVIAN
No!

DEVLIN
It's...(suddenly inspired)...it's ugly.

VIVIAN
(horrificed)
It is?

DEVLIN
Yes. It is an ugly, ugly name.

Vivian considers, then realizes.

VIVIAN
It is. (Aghast.) Oh! (With pencil, she scratches the name out violently.) There. (Deep breath. Regards list. Considers.) Hmm. (Considers list.) Upon reflection...I dare say I don't care for Honeysuckle either. (Scratches name.) Nor Perrywinkle. (Scratches name.) Guennivere? (Considers. Decides. Scratches.) Isabelle...(Considers. Approves. Reconsiders. Scratches.) Katherine...(Considers. Laughs at her own foolishness. Scratches.) Alexandra...(Considers. Seeks to find flaw. Finds none. Brightens. Turns and offers to Devlin.) Alexandra? (Searches for some reaction from him. Finding none, Vivian offers again with regal grandiosity.) Alexandra!

Devlin considers, recoils as from a foul odor, and disapproves. Vivian is dejected. Limply, she scratches the last name. She lays the pad and pencil down. She turns to Devlin. Squints. Considers Devlin. Devlin sees that she is considering him. Vivian seethes with growing disgust for Devlin. He grows uncomfortable. He squirms.

DEVLIN
Actually, Alexandra is a rather--

VIVIAN
(combative)
What have you got?

DEVLIN
I beg your pardon.

VIVIAN

What have you got?

DEVLIN

What have I got?

VIVIAN

Yes. What have you got? Have you got any names? Have you given it any thought? Hm? Any thought at all? (*Sincerely disappointed in his shortcomings.*) Have you given a single moment's thought to Future Baby?

DEVLIN

(*lying*)

Yes.

VIVIAN

(*openly doubtful*)

Oh really?

DEVLIN

(*defiant*)

Yes!

VIVIAN

Well then, darling...what have you got?

DEVLIN

Well...(sincerely) actually, I have thought quite a bit about names for...Future Baby.

VIVIAN

(*defying him to impress her*)

And...?

Devlin straightens himself and makes ready to present his names.

DEVLIN

Alright...well I don't have a formal list but--(*Vivian scoffs at his lack of preparedness. Devlin receives this, is somewhat bruised by it, and so shores up his reserves of courage before continuing.*) Well, first--I mean, not first, but the first one that comes to mind, this is in no particular order--(*He breathes in, he breathes out. He offers the name to her.*) Max.

Pause.

VIVIAN

Max?

DEVLIN

Max.

VIVIAN

A girl named "Max."

DEVLIN

Well I didn't know we were having a girl.

VIVIAN

Well we are.

DEVLIN

Well you don't know that.

VIVIAN

(with venom)

Yes I do.

DEVLIN

I beg your pardon, my dear, but you don't.

VIVIAN

Yes I do.

DEVLIN

But darling, how can you possibly--

VIVIAN

Because I do! Because I know! Because I am *fixed! determined! focused! fixed!*

DEVLIN

(treading cautiously)

Darling...I understand. Forgive me. I do not mean to doubt your...resolve. Clearly you are...resolved. I was merely offering the possibility that there might be some slight chance that--*(Vivian's righteous indignation grows. Devlin sees this. And so retreats.)* But I see now that I was wrong. I am truly sorry. Please forgive me.

Pause. Vivian is jubilant again.

VIVIAN

Oh Devlin! *(She runs to him and smothers him with kisses.)* Oh you're such a sweetie-patootie! How did I get such a sweetie little patootie? Hmm? How did I get so lucky? *(She squeezes his head.)* Ooooooooh! I love you so much I just want to crush your head and eat your brain! *(Suddenly, a bolt of inspiration. She squeezes his head harder.)* You know what?

DEVLIN

(somewhat pained)

What?

VIVIAN

(releasing Devlin's head)

You go right ahead and you tell me those names.

Devlin mopes, passive aggressively.

DEVLIN

Aw, you don't want to hear them.

VIVIAN

Yes I do.

DEVLIN

But you've already decided that we're having a girl.

VIVIAN

Well, maybe I should give a boy a chance.

DEVLIN

(growing hopeful)

Really?

VIVIAN

(open minded)

Maybe.

DEVLIN

(seeking a promise)

Really?

VIVIAN

(making no promise)

Maybe.

DEVLIN

Okay. Well, first--I mean in no particular...first, Max.

VIVIAN

(unimpressed, yet encouraging)

Mm-hmm.

DEVLIN

So there's that. Okay, what about: Butch? *(Vivian disapproves.)* Okay, well I was trying to think of a name that would give our boy some substance. A name that would really define his courage and tenacity. A name that would inspire the requisite awe in his lady suitors and fear in his enemies. *(He pauses for dramatic effect.)* Victor. *(He searches for some reaction from Vivian. Receiving none, he continues.)* Triumphor. *(Vivian squints at him. Devlin mistakes her look and so continues enthusiastically.)* Titan! *(Vivian is confused and disgusted. Devlin again mistakes her reaction and continues with greater enthusiasm.)* Caliber!

(Greater confusion and revulsion from Vivian, greater enthusiasm from Devlin. Suddenly, he has a bolt of inspiration.) Magnus! (Greater inspiration.) Magnimous! (Supreme inspiration.) Maxmagnimous! (Vivian moves away from him in disgust. Devlin realizes his mistake. Pause. Meekly, Devlin pursues a new line.) Bullet?... (Coldness from Vivian.) Sniper?... (More coldness from Vivian.) Heisman?

VIVIAN

Devlin! *(Devlin cowers.)* That's enough!

Devlin nods.

Pause.

Vivian sits. She sips her tea. Finding no comfort there, she sets the cup down.

Pause.

Devlin raises his head and looks to her.

DEVLIN

Do you remember the way things used to be?

Vivian turns to him.

Lights and music.

Another time. Another world.

Devlin stands and goes to Vivian. He offers his hand. She takes it. He pulls her up directly into an elegant ballroom dance move. She laughs.

They dance.

It is free and joyful: the way things used to be.

The dance ends.

They return to their seats.

Music out. Lights. Back from the other world, the other time.

Vivian gazes distantly at Devlin.

DEVLIN

Vivian.

VIVIAN

Yes, Devlin.

DEVLIN

I said, do you remember the way things used to be?

*Vivian deliberately turns from Devlin.
She regards the vase.*

VIVIAN

(suddenly cheerful)

Oh darling. What lovely flowers.

Pause. Devlin is defeated. He drinks his martini. He gazes into the empty glass. Vivian cheerfully arranges the pretty, useless flowers.

Devlin regards her with growing disgust. He stands. He goes to the kitchen and gets a large knife. He approaches Vivian from behind. He snatches the flowers from the vase, lays them down on the table and hacks the bulbs off.

Vivian stands and eyes him evenly.

VIVIAN

(with venom)

We will not be naming the baby Heisman. The baby shall be named Alexandra.

Pause. They eye one another. Devlin, still holding the knife, takes a step toward Vivian. Vivian, defiant, immediately steps toward Devlin.

Doorbell rings. (Preferably some cheerful, sing-song chime that Vivian must have chosen.)

Pause.

VIVIAN

(suddenly cheerful)

That must be the specialist!

Vivian hastens to the door, leaving Devlin holding the knife.

DEVLIN

Specialist? What specialist?

VIVIAN

Didn't I tell you? I'm sure I did.

Vivian answers the door. The Specialist is there. (The Specialist may be played by either a man or a woman. Either way, The Specialist wears dark elegant clothing reminiscent of a CIA operative in the 1960s, preferably with a hat. He or she also carries a dark case: briefcase, suitcase, or whatever type of case is needed to hold the equipment for the presentation, provided of course that it matches the costume.)

SPECIALIST

Mrs. Cleeves?

VIVIAN

Yes.

SPECIALIST

Vivian Cleeves?

VIVIAN

Yes, I'm Vivian. Do come in.

Specialist enters, sees Devlin.

SPECIALIST

Devlin Cleeves?

DEVLIN

Yes.

Specialist regards the knife. Devlin realizes he's still holding it, puts it away.

Specialist looks about.

SPECIALIST

Is there anyone else in the house?

VIVIAN

No.

SPECIALIST

You're certain we're alone?

VIVIAN

Yes.

DEVLIN

I beg your pardon, but...who are you?

VIVIAN

Darling, this is the specialist I told you about.

DEVLIN

You told me no such thing.

VIVIAN

I've hired a specialist to help us with our...problem.

DEVLIN

You've what? To help us with our what? *(to Specialist)* Look here, I don't mean to be rude but who are you?

SPECIALIST

I'm here to help, sir.

DEVLIN

That's wonderful. Peachy. We certainly need all the help we can get. But what I'm asking is: what is your name?

SPECIALIST

I'm afraid I can't tell you that.

DEVLIN

What?

SPECIALIST

I cannot give you my name, sir.

DEVLIN

Why not?

SPECIALIST

The business I'm here about, sir, is quite...delicate. I think you'll see after my presentation that we need to work on a strictly need-to-know basis. And my name is something which, strictly speaking, you do not need to know.

Pause. Devlin blinks at The Specialist.

DEVLIN

(sitting with resignation)

Well, I'm completely flummoxed.

VIVIAN

Devlin, I believe what the specialist is saying is that--in a situation such as ours, that--*(to Specialist)* no, I'm afraid I have no idea what your saying either.

Specialist gestures for Vivian to sit near Devlin.

SPECIALIST

Please, Mrs. Cleeves, have a seat. (*Gestures with the case.*)
If I may?

VIVIAN

Yes, of course.

Throughout the following, The Specialist removes the requisite items from the case in order to make the presentation. This may be as technically simple or complex as one chooses. It may involve a laptop PowerPoint presentation complete with a digital projector and graphics that may be seen by the audience. It may involve a projector pointed out above the audience that no one can see, but which may be imagined by Vivian and Devlin's reactions to the unseen images. It may be done with a laptop placed where the actors may see it but the audience may not, again imagining the images off the actors' reactions. It may involve poster-boards and hand rendered diagrams. Whatever works best.

SPECIALIST

At this point in the process, all of my clients are just as bewildered as you are now. But fear not. All will be made clear. I have prepared a special presentation on the particulars of your specific case, complete with several options for how I may help fix your...problem.

The Specialist begins the presentation proper by reading the first in a series of titles. Certain obvious points in the presentation might have corresponding titles, but the presentation may include as many or as few parts as one sees fit.

SPECIALIST

"Your Future Baby and You." First, we must properly identify the problem. Using the medical records you were kind enough to provide for me, Mrs. Cleeves, I was able to determine that the problem is indeed medical.

VIVIAN

Please, call me Vivian.

DEVLIN

Medical records?

SPECIALIST

Of course, Vivian.

VIVIAN

Is it me? Am I the problem?

SPECIALIST

No. Your eggs are quite healthy. Your uterus is without impediment. You are a rich and fertile soil ready for the plow and the seed.

VIVIAN

So it's him! It's his fault!

SPECIALIST

No. Mr. Cleeves, your sperm are virile and plentiful, able to swim upstream against great odds and plant a flag deep in the mother country.

DEVLIN

Um...thank you?

VIVIAN

So then what *is* the problem?

SPECIALIST

The problem is a rare condition known as *in vitro insemina disjectum*.

DEVLIN

Oh, dear God, it's cancer, isn't it?

SPECIALIST

No.

VIVIAN

Hush, Devlin.

SPECIALIST

In vitro insemina disjectum is an extremely rare syndrome wherein a perfectly healthy egg and a perfectly healthy sperm meet in the body and simply reject each other. Much in the same way an organ transplanted into a new host runs the risk that it will be rejected by the body, your egg, Vivian, and your sperm, Devlin, are rejecting one another.

VIVIAN

Are you certain, doctor?

SPECIALIST

Yes.

DEVLIN

Are you a doctor?

SPECIALIST

No.

VIVIAN

I've never heard of such a condition.

SPECIALIST

Most people haven't.

DEVLIN

Who's rejecting whom, exactly?

SPECIALIST

I beg your pardon?

VIVIAN

Yes, is his sperm rejecting my egg?

DEVLIN

Or is it the other way round?

SPECIALIST

I see. We have no way of knowing who is rejecting whom, exactly, but the most popular theory holds that you are each rejecting the other. For some reason, unknown to modern science, your body, Vivian, has developed a revulsion to Devlin's sperm. But likewise, Devlin, your sperm have developed a revulsion for Vivian's eggs. For you see, if the eggs were the only guilty party, then your sperm would simply take her by force. If they wanted to. Which clearly they do not. Conversely, if the sperm were the only guilty party, then the egg would simply wait in her lair, like a Venus Flytrap, until a sperm came along and she would gobble it up. If she wanted to. Which clearly she does not. Your sperm and your egg simply do not like each other. That is why you are without child.

VIVIAN

(with melancholy)

Without child...

Devlin takes Vivian's hand. Vivian looks to him for comfort.

DEVLIN

(to Specialist)

You said, my sperm have developed a revulsion against eggs, is it possible that--

SPECIALIST

Not all eggs. Just Vivian's.

DEVLIN

What?

SPECIALIST

Your sperm have not developed a revulsion against eggs, they've developed a revulsion against Vivian's eggs. Likewise, Vivian's eggs are not repulsed by all sperm, just your sperm.

DEVLIN

Good God! Are you saying...are you saying...what are you saying?

SPECIALIST

In vitro insemina disjectum is a shared syndrome. It requires two hosts: a male and a female. And I must stress again that medical science does not yet know how or why this condition develops. It is almost inconceivably rare. But when it does develop it is specific to the *pair* of hosts. The odds of either of the host pair experiencing the same syndrome with an outside party are, roughly...nine billion to one.

Pause.

VIVIAN

Nine billion to one...

SPECIALIST

Give or take.

Beat.

DEVLIN

There are only six billion people in the world.

SPECIALIST

Give or take.

Beat.

DEVLIN

You're saying that my sperm could impregnate literally every other woman on the planet but my wife.

VIVIAN

And I could be impregnated by any other man on the planet but my husband.

SPECIALIST

Yes. As the saying goes, *it takes two to tango*. Or, in your case, to not tango.

Beat.

VIVIAN

What about medicine? Is there a pill we could take?

SPECIALIST

No. No drug companies would bother to manufacture a pill for such an extremely small market.

VIVIAN

What about a procedure? A surgery, perhaps?

SPECIALIST

I'm afraid not.

DEVLIN

What about artificial insemination? My sperm, her egg, force the little bastards together and plant them back up there?

SPECIALIST

Yes, that's possible, but I wouldn't recommend it.

VIVIAN

Why not?

SPECIALIST

In the few known cases of *in vitro insemina disjectum* there are four recorded instances of couples who responded to the syndrome with artificial insemination. All four met with results that were...undesirable.

DEVLIN

Undesirable how?

SPECIALIST

All four cases resulted in fraternal twins. In three of the cases the twins...devoured each other in the mother's womb.

VIVIAN

Oh dear God!

SPECIALIST

Indeed.

DEVLIN

What happened in the fourth case?

SPECIALIST

The twins grew up happy and healthy until the age of seven when they...viciously murdered their parents.

Vivian gasps.

VIVIAN

Well, that's it then, isn't it? It's pointless. All that sex for nothing!

DEVLIN

Wait a minute now, you said that we *developed* this condition, yes?

SPECIALIST

Correct.

DEVLIN

Then shouldn't the condition be reversible?

SPECIALIST

Not...quite.

VIVIAN

Not quite?

DEVLIN

What does *not quite* mean?

VIVIAN

Do you mean there's hope?

SPECIALIST

Of course. There is always hope. You *do* have options. (*Vivian and Devlin look to each other, then back to The Specialist.*) I know this has come as quite a shock to both of you. I can see that you are still absorbing the full impact of this. But, if it's not too much for you, I would like to walk you through some of those options now, if I may.

DEVLIN

(irked)

Of course.

VIVIAN

(eagerly)

Yes, please do.

The presentation continues.

SPECIALIST

Well first, you must understand that while your egg and your sperm have developed a seething hatred for each other, they still belong together. Deep in their primal DNA they are both hard-wired for reproduction. So although we must not force them together physically, it is possible--given enough time and employing the proper techniques--to persuade them to join together naturally.

VIVIAN

It is?

DEVLIN

How can we do that?

SPECIALIST

There are two schools of thought on the subject. First, The Eastern Method. This method uses tantric yoga and breathing techniques, during the sexual act, to purge the negative energy from your bodies. The Eastern Method will literally retrain your eggs and your sperm to see one another as they really are. To embrace one another, despite each other's flaws. To accept one another on their own terms. Of course, learning to love is not easy. This method requires at least one year of tantric training during which time you must adhere to a strict diet of nuts, berries and twigs. After your year of training, for tantric insemination to be successful, you must perform the act of love in marathon sessions of no fewer than eight hours, during which you must remain physically coupled the entire time. To aid you both in achieving such a Herculean feat of endurance, you must drink a concoction of exotic Indian teas which, if properly balanced, will cause intense hallucinations, and, if not properly balanced, could be fatal.

Pause. Vivian and Devlin are speechless. They regard one another, then turn back to The Specialist.

The presentation continues.

SPECIALIST

Our second choice: The Western Method. For the Western Method, you will need to determine which days of each month you are ovulating. During those days, you will perform multiple sex acts while hanging from a complicated network of suspension cables. Using a system of cantilevers, pulleys and leather harnesses, you will contort yourselves into a specific series of extreme positions designed to maximize the number of contacts between sperm and egg by channeling the forces of gravity and pain. Your egg and your sperm will be forced into combat, a pitched battle of rage and catharsis. To ensure that both egg and sperm expel all of their true inner feelings upon one another, we will combine this volcanic copulation with Gestalt Therapy. Because your eggs and your sperm harbor such deep seeded loathing for each other, you must use Gestalt Therapy to delve down into the depths of those buried feelings and bring them to the surface. While your bodies hang in the air, twisted and knotted together in savage, murderous copulation you will scream into each other's open mouths. (*Screams once, savage and murderous:*) Aaaaaaaaah! (*Suddenly clinical:*) You must do this at least four times a day throughout the three day ovulation cycle. As you might imagine, this method often results in serious physical injury. It's also quite loud. It usually cannot be performed in an urban or even suburban setting. Deed restrictions and all. Likewise, it requires installing some rather large and labyrinthine pieces of expensive equipment.

However, I can offer you some assistance there. It so happens that I already have a Western Method Gauntlet in my basement. You may use it for a small fee. Also, if you wish, I have a system of video cameras installed in my (soundproof) basement and I would be happy to record the miracle of conception. For posterity. And scrapbooking. That sort of thing.

Pause. Vivian is horrified. Devlin is stunned, but not horrified. Perhaps intrigued.

The presentation continues.

SPECIALIST

Our third option: a surrogate. If you choose not to force your egg and sperm into reconciliation, a surrogate just might be right for you. Here, you actually have several choices, the first of which is, if I may be so bold...me. In these past several minutes that we have gotten to know one another I have grown quite fond of you both and I would be all too happy to help bring a little piece of Heaven into your lives. (*If Specialist is played by a man:*) I offer reasonably priced stud services. You may choose in vitro insemination or, for a small discount, we can do it the old fashioned way. As many times as necessary. (*If Specialist is played by a woman:*) I offer reasonably priced surrogate services. You may choose in vitro insemination or, for a small gratuity, we can do it the old fashioned way. As many times as necessary. (*Man or Woman, The Specialist continues:*) Shhh...don't answer now. Just think about it.

Vivian and Devlin share a look.

The presentation continues.

SPECIALIST

Of course, if you prefer a more anonymous surrogate you could always hire one. Here you have two popular options, each with their own set of pros and cons. First, an American. PROS: the baby will be born God fearing and English speaking. CONS: Americans are very costly. Not to mention, highly unstable. American surrogates often renege on the deal and keep the baby. Also, statistics show that American children are more prone to violence, insolence and diabetes. Second, a Ukrainian. PROS: Much cheaper. Ukrainian women are more stable, more reasonable than American women. Baby will be white. CONS: Does require you to provide travel arrangements from the Ukraine as well as housing for the surrogate while she is pregnant. Plus, she will probably require you to provide her with a husband in order to obtain American citizenship. Also, statistics show that Ukrainian children are more prone to alcoholism, socialism and low levels of radioactivity.

Vivian and Devlin consider seriously the pros and cons of each.

The presentation continues.

SPECIALIST

Our fourth option: China. There you can simply buy a baby. PROS: Very fashionable these days. They're cheap. Roughly the same price as a home computer and better at math. CONS: Baby will look Chinese.

Vivian rather likes this option. Devlin is uncertain.

The presentation continues.

SPECIALIST

Our fifth option in commercial progeny: the White Slavery Market. PROS: Baby will be white. CONS: Very expensive. High risk of being murdered during the transaction. Also, statistics show that such babies have a higher rate of prostitution.

Both Vivian and Devlin dismiss this option.

The presentation continues.

SPECIALIST

And for our last option: kidnapping. PROS: This is an excellent choice for obvious reasons. You can choose literally any baby you can get your hands on. You needn't travel further than your nearest shopping mall, playground, amusement park, what have you. And best of all, you don't have to pay for it. CONS: Federal prison--which would, of course, remain a lingering fear for the rest of your life. Also, there is the slight risk of having to murder someone else during the transaction, not necessarily a deal breaker.

Devlin rather likes this option. Vivian is uncertain.

SPECIALIST

And that, as they say, is that. (*The presentation ends.*) Naturally, as your private specialist, I am prepared and able to assist you in any and all of these options. Questions?

Long pause, while Devlin and Vivian think of any questions.

DEVLIN

Radioactivity?

Indeed. Low levels.
SPECIALIST

Pause.

VIVIAN
Well, your presentation was absolutely...extraordinary!

DEVLIN
Yes.

SPECIALIST
Thank you.

VIVIAN
Really...remarkable.

DEVLIN
Yes. Definitely.

SPECIALIST
You're too kind.

Pause.

DEVLIN
Really gives you something to think about, I think. Don't you think, darling?

VIVIAN
Yes. Quite a lot to...

DEVLIN
...think about.

Pause.

SPECIALIST
Well, I'll leave you two to mull it over. (*Begins packing up.*) Vivian, you have my contact information. No hurry, just drop a line anytime to let me know which direction the wind is blowing and we'll take it from there.

VIVIAN
Of course, and thank you so much for dropping by.

SPECIALIST
Not at all.

VIVIAN
So rare that one finds a doctor who still makes house calls.

SPECIALIST
Yes.

DEVLIN

But you're not a doctor, are you?

SPECIALIST

No. Well! I think that's everything! (*A slight bow.*) Mr. and Mrs. Cleeves. (*Specialist goes. Beat. Specialist returns, startling Vivian and Devlin.*) May I ask you both something rather...personal?

Devlin is uncertain but Vivian is not.

VIVIAN

Yes, of course!

Pause.

SPECIALIST

Why a baby?

Vivian and Devlin share a look.

DEVLIN

I beg your pardon?

SPECIALIST

If I am overstepping my boundaries, please, tell me so, but I feel that we've grown quite close in these past several minutes, so I feel at liberty to ask...why a baby?

Pause.

DEVLIN

What an outrageous question!

SPECIALIST

Please, do forgive me, I--

DEVLIN

Why a baby?!

SPECIALIST

--I don't mean to--

DEVLIN

Why a baby?! What the hell kind of question is that?!

VIVIAN

Devlin--

DEVLIN

Why a baby?!

VIVIAN

Devlin, do calm down.

DEVLIN

It's-it's-it's--the nerve! The unmitigated gall to come in here and ask us--it's-it's-it's--

SPECIALIST

It's a fair question.

DEVLIN

It's absurd! It's insane! It's an insanely absurd question!

SPECIALIST

Why?

DEVLIN

Why?

SPECIALIST

Yes, why?

DEVLIN

Because...everyone knows...a baby is...is...everyone knows why!

VIVIAN

Devlin, that's enough now. (*to the Specialist*) What my husband is trying to say is that we want a baby because...well, we've always dreamed of...that is to say that we've always wanted...I suppose our reasons our the same as anyone else's.

DEVLIN

Yes! The same as anyone else's!

SPECIALIST

And what are they?

DEVLIN

What?

SPECIALIST

The reasons. Anyone else's reasons. What are they?

Pause. Devlin and Vivian look to each other for help. Finding none, Devlin turns back to the Specialist.

DEVLIN

I don't think I care for your tone.

SPECIALIST

My tone?

VIVIAN

Yes. Why are we explaining anything to you? We don't have to explain ourselves.

SPECIALIST

Is that right?

VIVIAN

Yes. That's right. And another thing...I think you have, in fact, *overstepped your boundaries*.

SPECIALIST

Have I?

VIVIAN

Yes. You have.

DEVLIN

And I don't think I care for your tone.

SPECIALIST

Is that so?

DEVLIN

Yes, that is so. (*to Vivian*) Do you hear that, darling?

VIVIAN

Yes, I believe I do.

DEVLIN

The tone? It's the tone, I'm talking about. Do you hear it?

VIVIAN

I do.

DEVLIN

Do you know what I think that is, darling?

VIVIAN

What?

DEVLIN

That certain quality we're picking up on, do you know what that is?

VIVIAN

What is it, my darling?

DEVLIN

It's...ugly.

Vivian's defenses tighten.

VIVIAN
Yes. Yes it is.

DEVLIN
Very ugly.

VIVIAN
(with venom)
It's an ugly, ugly tone.

DEVLIN
(to Specialist)
We can't have that in our home, I'm afraid.

VIVIAN
I will not stand for ugliness in my home.

DEVLIN
She doesn't care for it.

VIVIAN
There is quite enough ugliness in the world. No need to make more of it.

SPECIALIST
I quite agree.

DEVLIN
There it is again, darling, do you hear it?

VIVIAN
Yes.

DEVLIN
The ugliness? In the tone?

VIVIAN
I hear it.

DEVLIN
Why do people have to be so...ugly?

VIVIAN
I don't know.

DEVLIN
It's so unnecessary.

VIVIAN
It's so unfair.

DEVLIN
It is.

VIVIAN
To the rest of us.

DEVLIN
Who have to live with it.

VIVIAN
We who have to live amidst the ugliness of others.

DEVLIN
It isn't right.

VIVIAN
It's what makes this world so unbearable.

DEVLIN
It's the only thing, really.

VIVIAN
If it weren't for those...people.

DEVLIN
The world would be so much better.

VIVIAN
So much easier.

DEVLIN
So much more...

VIVIAN
Beautiful.

DEVLIN
Yes.

VIVIAN
The world would be so beautiful if it weren't for them.

DEVLIN
Them and their ugliness.

VIVIAN
*(tearing up at the injustice of
it all)*
It's isn't right.

DEVLIN
No.

VIVIAN
It isn't fair.

No.

DEVLIN

Vivian weeps: controlled, boiling from deep within, but always controlled.

VIVIAN

I hate them.

DEVLIN

You're right to hate them, my love.

VIVIAN

I hate them all.

DEVLIN

They deserve your hatred, my love.

VIVIAN

I hate them all so much.

DEVLIN

It's good to hate them, my love. It's what keeps us from becoming one of them.

VIVIAN

I'll never become one of them!

DEVLIN

Never.

VIVIAN

I would rather die.

DEVLIN

They're the ones who should die.

VIVIAN

Yes! I wish they all would die!

DEVLIN

I do too, my love.

VIVIAN

I want to kill them.

DEVLIN

Yes.

VIVIAN

I want to kill them for making me hate them.

DEVLIN

Yes.

VIVIAN
I shouldn't have to feel this hatred.

DEVLIN
You're right to hate them. But you shouldn't *have* to.

VIVIAN
They make me hate them.

DEVLIN
They force you to feel this hatred.

VIVIAN
Yes.

DEVLIN
It isn't right.

VIVIAN
It isn't fair.

Pause.

DEVLIN
(with finality)
We shouldn't have to put up with it.

Vivian regards Devlin lovingly.

VIVIAN
No. We shouldn't.

*Devlin wipes a tear from Vivian's face,
caresses her lovingly.*

*The Specialist sees something in them
for the first time.*

SPECIALIST
Right...

The Specialist exits.

DEVLIN
Do you know what I think you need, my darling?

VIVIAN
What?

DEVLIN
I think you need...a cup of tea.

VIVIAN
Yes.

DEVLIN

Doesn't that sound lovely?

VIVIAN

Yes.

DEVLIN

Yes, let me get it for you. You have a seat darling and let me get you a cup of tea.

Vivian sits. Devlin makes preparations for tea.

The phone rings.

VIVIAN

I'll get it, darling. *(She answers it.)* Hello...Yes, this is she...Oh, hello...You do?...*(alarmed)* What?...

DEVLIN

Darling? What is it?

Vivian holds the phone away from her and looks at it as if it's from another planet.

VIVIAN

It's the doctor. I'm pregnant.

Pause.

Curtain.

End of Act I.

ACT II

The Baby's Room. Actually, it's more of a Master Suite. Vivian has designed and decorated this room for her daughter, Alexandra. Everything in it is elegant and beautiful. Classic. Timeless. An enormous, luxurious space. Bay windows. Pretty wallpaper. Perhaps a mobile, some expensive stuffed animals, some dolls, a rocking horse for when Alexandra is older.

At the center of it all: the baby's crib.

Alexandra was born yesterday. Today will be her first day in her new home.

Enter Devlin carrying Alexandra and a comical amount of accoutrements for a new baby. Vivian follows, warily. She carries nothing.

DEVLIN

(to the baby)

Here we are! This is your room. Look at this. Isn't this beautiful? Look at the beautiful room Mommy has made for you. All of this is yours. *(delicately placing the baby in the crib)* And this is your bed. Let's lay you down right here. Oh, have you had a hard day? Yes, you have. You had a full day at the hospital and now you're finally here in your new home. So you just lay down right there and have yourself a nice rest. *(to Vivian)* Oh, Vivian. Isn't she beautiful? *(Pause. No answer.)* Vivian? *(Beat. No answer.)* What's wrong?

VIVIAN

Nothing.

DEVLIN

Nothing indeed. *(Devlin moves to Vivian, puts an arm around her.)* Everything is exactly right. Look at what you have here. The perfect home. The perfect husband. *(chuckles at his own joke)* And the perfect baby girl. Oh, how could I have ever thought having a girl would be a disappointment? What a fool I was! Just look at her! Look at this beautiful life we have created! I've never been so happy! Isn't it heavenly?

VIVIAN

(sourly)

Yes.

DEVLIN

You don't *sound* heavenly. (*Vivian shrugs.*) Don't you *feel* heavenly? (*Vivian glares at him.*) You *look* heavenly. (*Vivian rolls her eyes.*) Well, you must be tired. Here, have a seat.

VIVIAN

No, thank you.

DEVLIN

Don't you want to sit?

VIVIAN

I prefer to stand.

DEVLIN

Aren't you tired? Why, it was only yesterday that you endured the miracle of childbirth. I should imagine today you'd be--

VIVIAN

I've been lying in a hospital bed since yesterday's little miracle and now I prefer to stand.

DEVLIN

Fair enough. (*Backing off.*) Are you not feeling well?

VIVIAN

I'm fine.

DEVLIN

Are you sure? Perhaps you're suffering from one of the many postpartum conditions about which the doctor warned us. Do you feel your suffering from a postpartum condition?

VIVIAN

(*fatigued by Devlin*)

Now that you mention it, I suddenly feel tired.

She sits, away from Alexandra.

DEVLIN

I shall consult the handbook the doctor gave us! (*Devlin withdraws a handbook from his pocket, reads the title aloud, with great satisfaction.*) "Your Little Miracle and You." Let's see...(*Leafs through the book, finds something.*) "Postpartum Depression." Are you depressed?

VIVIAN

No.

DEVLIN

You look depressed.

VIVIAN

You said I look "heavenly."

DEVLIN

Aha! Sarcasm. A clear sign of depression.

VIVIAN

I'm not being sarcastic. I'm being condescending. Do learn the difference.

DEVLIN

Condescending? (*Leafs through the book, finds nothing.*) I don't see anything about condescension. (*Considers her original remark.*) Are you quite certain that was condescension?

VIVIAN

Yes! I'm quite certain!

DEVLIN

Aha! Hostility! (*Leafs through book...*) There is definitely a passage in here regarding hostility... (*Finds something.*) Hostility: see "Depression." (*Flips instantly back to the section on Depression. Reads quickly.*) Hmph. How about that?

VIVIAN

How about what?

DEVLIN

It says here that feelings of Postpartum Depression can often be subconscious or even unconscious. (*To her, sincerely.*) Are you having any feelings of Postpartum Depression that are subconscious or even unconscious?

Beat.

VIVIAN

If the feelings are unconscious, how could I possibly know?

Pause. Devlin thinks.

DEVLIN

True. But what about sub?

VIVIAN

Sub?

DEVLIN

Yes, sub. As opposed to un.

VIVIAN

Sub as opposed to un.

DEVLIN

Indeed.

VIVIAN
What's the difference?

Devlin begins to respond, realizes he doesn't know, stops, thinks. Consults handbook.

VIVIAN
(*commanding*)
Put that book down now!

Devlin obeys.

The baby cries, briefly--a soft, delicate, girlish cry--then stops.

DEVLIN
(*alarmed*)
What was that?

VIVIAN
(*frightened*)
I don't know.

The baby cries again, as before, stops.

DEVLIN
I think it's coming from the crib.

VIVIAN
From the baby?

DEVLIN
Yes.

VIVIAN
No!

DEVLIN
What do we do?

VIVIAN
I don't know!

The baby cries again, as before, stops.

VIVIAN
Get the book!

Devlin lunges for the book, rifles through it.

DEVLIN

Crying...*(rifling)*...crying...*(rifling)*...Aha! "Crying."
(reads) "Babies cry. Sometimes." *(Squints at book. Quickly
 looks for more. Flips page. Looks for more. Finds nothing.
 Flips back.)*

VIVIAN

That's it?

DEVLIN

That's it.

VIVIAN

"Babies cry."

DEVLIN

(reads from book)

"Sometimes."

VIVIAN

So this is normal.

DEVLIN

I believe this is normal, yes.

VIVIAN

Well, *why* is she crying.

Devlin consults book. Flips page.

DEVLIN

(reading)

"Perhaps she's hungry."

VIVIAN

It actually says that?

DEVLIN

*(reading again, pleased with
 book)*

"Perhaps she's hungry."

VIVIAN

Yes! That's it! She's hungry! That's all it is!

DEVLIN

Right!

*Pause. Devlin regards Vivian
 expectantly.*

VIVIAN

(oblivious)

So feed her.

DEVLIN

(delicately)

Actually, darling, I believe that's your job.

VIVIAN

(sincerely)

It is?

DEVLIN

Yes. Don't you remember...? when the doctor explained to us...? your special...gift?

Vivian remembers. She instantly clutches her breasts.

VIVIAN

(decidedly)

Don't even think about it.

DEVLIN

But darling, remember, the doctor said it was quite natural.

VIVIAN

Not going to happen.

DEVLIN

I see. Right. *(Puts the book down.)* Not a problem. We have a bottle of formula here.

Withdraws a bottle of formula from the accoutrements, presents it to her.

VIVIAN

You do it.

Devlin hesitates, but forges ahead.

DEVLIN

Right.

He approaches the crib, awkwardly, holding the formula out in front of him.

DEVLIN

Let's see...

He arrives at the crib, considers how to proceed. Holding the bottle where the baby can reach it, he offers it to Alexandra.

DEVLIN

Here you are.

She doesn't take it.

DEVLIN

Right. Okay, let's try this.

He holds the bottle over her mouth and lightly pops the bottom of it, as though extracting ketchup.

DEVLIN

Here you go.

The baby cries, soft but steady.

DEVLIN

Oh, dear. That's not working, is it.

He grabs a baby blanket from the accoutrements and dabs the formula from her face. Crying continues. He thinks.

DEVLIN

I believe we have to hold her while we feed her.

VIVIAN

Yes, I believe you're right.

Beat. Devlin sees that Vivian won't take the lead, and so he hands the bottle to Vivian, carefully picks up Alexandra, holds her properly, as he did before, takes the bottle from Vivian, and feeds the baby. Crying stops.

DEVLIN

(sighing with relief)

Ah. There we are. That wasn't so bad. *(Convinced.)* I think we're going to be alright!

VIVIAN

(unconvinced)

Naturally.

Devlin enjoys feeding Alexandra.

DEVLIN

This is quite fun, actually.

VIVIAN

(skeptical)

Yes?

DEVLIN
Would you like to try?

VIVIAN
(alarmed)
What?

DEVLIN
Would you like to feed her?

VIVIAN
(retreating)
No, thank you.

DEVLIN
No?

VIVIAN
You're doing very well. I don't want to...interrupt.

DEVLIN
It's no bother, really. Here, hold out your arms and I'll pass her to you.

VIVIAN
That's quite alright.

DEVLIN
Won't skip a beat.

VIVIAN
I'd rather not.

DEVLIN
Piece o' cake. Hold out your arms and--

VIVIAN
I don't want to!

Pause. Devlin concedes. He feeds Alexandra a bit more.

DEVLIN
Alright. There we are. Had enough for now, have we?

He takes the bottle from her. No crying.

DEVLIN (CONT'D)
Very good. Dear?

He offers the bottle to Vivian. She takes it.

Thank you.

DEVLIN

Devlin regards Alexandra curiously. He frowns. Vivian notices.

VIVIAN
(concerned)

What is it?

DEVLIN

Her face. She's not hungry anymore. She's not crying. And yet her face seems...

VIVIAN

Seems what?

DEVLIN

Unsatisfied. *(He thinks. Suddenly remembers.)* I think she has to be burped.

VIVIAN
(mortified)

Burped?

DEVLIN

Burped.

Vivian backs away, decisively.

VIVIAN

Good luck with that.

DEVLIN

Oh, it's nothing really. All we have to do is--*(moving Alexandra to his shoulder, the traditional burping position)*--honestly, darling, do you remember nothing the doctor told us? All we have to do is--*(giving Alexandra a few gentle pats)*--give her a few gentle pats and--

An absurdly loud, long, deep burp. As soon as the burp begins, Devlin and Vivian freeze. The burp continues. Improbably loud. Impossibly long. Immensely deep.

Finally, the burp stops.

Devlin and Vivian slowly turn to one another in shock. Devlin, slowly, carefully, moves Alexandra from his shoulder. For a moment, he stares at her in amazement. Then...he smiles.

He beams, a tear of pride forming in his glowing eyes.)

DEVLIN

That's my girl! *(He hugs Alexandra warmly.)* Did you hear that, darling?

VIVIAN

(appalled at such a silly question)

Yes.

DEVLIN

Isn't she a marvel?

VIVIAN

(sarcastically)

It certainly was...*fantastic.*

DEVLIN

Oh, my perfect little miracle!

VIVIAN

Do you think that was...*(Devlin turns expectantly to Vivian)...*normal?

DEVLIN

Normal?

VIVIAN

Yes.

DEVLIN

Absolutely not! That was extraordinary! That was outstanding! Clearly we have been blessed with a child who is...*(holding Alexandra out in front of him so that he may marvel at her greatness)...*superior! *(To Alexandra)* Yes, my little angel! That's exactly what you are. You are superior. You are special. You are better.

Vivian, eyes on Alexandra, edges closer to try and see these special qualities that Devlin sees. A brief moment passes in which Devlin continues to see them, but Vivian does not.

Devlin turns and sees Vivian. Vivian is slightly startled.

Devlin smiles at Vivian.

DEVLIN

(delicately)

Take her.

VIVIAN
(deferentially)
 No, thank you.

DEVLIN
(warmly)
 Go on, take her.

VIVIAN
(politely)
 I'd rather not.

DEVLIN
(reassuringly)
 You won't break her.

VIVIAN
(crossly)
 Of course I wouldn't break her.

DEVLIN
(apologetically)
 No, of course you wouldn't.

VIVIAN
(angrily)
 Why would you say such a thing?

DEVLIN
(contritely)
 I didn't mean to imply that you--

Vivian turns from him. Devlin considers pursuing his contrition. Thinks better of it. Turns to Alexandra. He basks in the glow of her radiance.

Then, he gently returns her to her crib.

VIVIAN
 Honestly, Devlin, sometimes you say such stupid things.

Pause. Devlin is wounded.

DEVLIN
(all the while, his eyes on Alexandra)
 Do I? Yes, I suppose I do.

Vivian, seeing she has wounded him, softens.

VIVIAN

Well...no harm, no foul. *(She approaches Devlin, kisses him on the cheek, takes his hand and pats it, then returns it. Devlin never turns from Alexandra.)* Come on. Let's have some lunch.

Vivian goes to the door. Devlin remains, gazing at Alexandra.

DEVLIN

It's just that--*(Devlin cuts himself off. Vivian stops, but doesn't turn.)*

VIVIAN

Yes?

DEVLIN

It's just strange to me that you still haven't--

Again, Devlin stops himself. It doesn't matter. Vivian knows what he was going to say. Pause. She takes a breath, steels herself, and turns to him.

VIVIAN

That I still haven't what?

Pause. Devlin surrenders.

DEVLIN

Never mind. *(Finally, he turns to her.)* Let's have some lunch.

Pause. Vivian exits. Devlin follows. On his way out, he turns out the light.

Semi-darkness. Just for a moment, until...

A LOUD DISTURBING SOUND COMES FROM THE CRIB: a lion's GROWL--low, menacing, predatory. It lingers a moment, then stops.

Devlin dashes back into the room, turning the lights back on.

DEVLIN (CONT'D)

What the hell was that?

Devlin immediately begins searching the room for anything that might harm Alexandra. Vivian lingers timidly in the doorway.

It sounded like--
VIVIAN

ANOTHER LOUD LION SOUND FROM THE CRIB: this time, an open ROAR--ferocious, lethal. Instantly, Devlin turns to the crib while Vivian hides. Sound stops. Devlin stares at crib, aghast. Vivian peeks out.

Oh my God! Where's it coming from?
VIVIAN

Devlin slowly approaches the crib. Vivian sees what he is thinking.

No. It can't be.
VIVIAN

Devlin stops near the crib, looking down on Alexandra.

I think it is.
DEVLIN

No.
VIVIAN

Who else?
DEVLIN

But how...?
VIVIAN

I don't know. It's...
DEVLIN

What? What is it?
VIVIAN

ANOTHER LION SOUND FROM THE CRIB: this time, a lion's PURR--gentle, calm.

A miracle.
DEVLIN

Purr continues.

What?
VIVIAN
(*incredulous*)

It's a miracle.
DEVLIN

*Devlin admires the miracle of
Alexandra.*

VIVIAN

That is not a miracle.

DEVLIN

What else could it be? Listen to her. *(They listen. Purring continues.)* Isn't that beautiful? Listen to the heavenly music our little miracle is making!

VIVIAN

That's not music.

DEVLIN

Of course it is.

VIVIAN

No. It's not music and it's not a miracle. It's...wrong.

DEVLIN

No, it isn't.

VIVIAN

There's something wrong with her.

DEVLIN

There's nothing wrong with her.

VIVIAN

It's not right.

DEVLIN

It's extraordinary!

VIVIAN

Devlin, the baby is purring! That's not *special*. That's *abnormal*!

Purring stops. Beat. Both take notice.

DEVLIN

Now look what you've done. She's stopped. Are you happy now?

VIVIAN

It's not my fault she stopped growling.

DEVLIN

She wasn't growling. She was singing.

VIVIAN

That wasn't singing!

Alexandra sings.

Opera.

In Italian. Including orchestra.

With extraordinary sophistication and range.

DEVLIN

(gloating)

What do you call that?

VIVIAN

(amazed)

Singing.

They listen: moved, enraptured. Music continues--from the crib. Always from the crib.

DEVLIN

Now do you see how special she is?

VIVIAN

But...how...?

DEVLIN

She's a virtuoso!

VIVIAN

But...she's singing in Italian!

DEVLIN

Yes!

VIVIAN

How can she possibly speak Italian?

DEVLIN

She's obviously above average!

VIVIAN

And the orchestra? How is she able to replicate that?

They listen. The opera swells. Builds. Climaxes. Ends.

Followed, of course, by applause. From the crib. As of a great opera hall giving a standing ovation.

VIVIAN

(exasperated)

Oh, come on!

Devlin applauds enthusiastically.

DEVLIN

Brava! Bravisima!

Applause cuts out sharply. Devlin is startled for a moment, then continues to applaud anyway.

DEVLIN

Bravise! Encore! Encore!

VIVIAN

You've lost your mind.

Devlin stops applauding.

DEVLIN

(giddy with delight)

She's a prodigy! You've given birth to a musical prodigy!

VIVIAN

You think so?

DEVLIN

She'll be the toast of Europe!

VIVIAN

Devlin, I'm scared. I don't know what's happening here.

DEVLIN

Oh, darling. Don't be frightened. There's nothing to fear.

VIVIAN

Those sounds. From the baby. It's unnatural.

DEVLIN

It's *supernatural!*

VIVIAN

Okay! That doesn't make feel any better!

DEVLIN

It should.

VIVIAN

I take no comfort in having a *supernatural* baby!

DEVLIN

Why on Earth not?

VIVIAN

I want a natural baby! A normal baby!

DEVLIN

You see? That's the trouble with our Western culture! We have no connection to the supernatural! In African cultures, in Latin-American cultures, in tribal cultures, they embrace the supernatural! We needn't be afraid of it, darling. Let's welcome it! Let's celebrate it!

VIVIAN

Let's return it.

DEVLIN

Let's what?

VIVIAN

Return it. Her. Return her.

DEVLIN

What do you mean, *return her*?

VIVIAN

We have seven days.

DEVLIN

Seven days.

VIVIAN

Yes. We have seven days. It's the law. We're allowed to return her within seven days. No questions asked. It's the law. I looked it up.

DEVLIN

Return her...to whom?

VIVIAN

To the hospital. Or the police. Or a fire station. No questions asked. No criminal charges pursued. If we feel we cannot...*care for her*.

Pause.

DEVLIN

But we *can* care for her. We *do* care for her.

VIVIAN

If we cannot...*provide* for her.

Devlin indicates the luxuries of their home.

DEVLIN

Look around you. We can provide for her. Abundantly.

VIVIAN

She needs more than we can provide.

DEVLIN
What more could she possibly need?

VIVIAN
She needs more than *I* can provide.

Pause.

DEVLIN
You mean, more than you wish to provide.

VIVIAN
More than I am able.

DEVLIN
More than you *will*.

Pause.

VIVIAN
Fine. More than I will.

Pause.

DEVLIN
When did you look it up?

VIVIAN
What?

DEVLIN
The law. The law regarding the abandonment of your child. When did you--*(He stops short and grabs his stomach. A sharp pain in his abdomen. He takes a breath. Steadies himself.)* I didn't even know there were such laws. It certainly never occurred to me to...When did you look it up?

VIVIAN
I don't remember.

DEVLIN
You do.

VIVIAN
What does it matter?

DEVLIN
It matters. When?

VIVIAN
(honestly)
I suppose it must have been...perhaps a month ago.

DEVLIN
A month ago?

VIVIAN
Around then, yes.

DEVLIN
Never before that?

VIVIAN
No.

DEVLIN
Never at the beginning?

VIVIAN
No.

DEVLIN
Not in the first month? When the doctor phoned? Or the second month, when we bought all the books? Or the third month, when we finally told everyone? Or the fourth month, when we visited our accountant to put all of our affairs in order? Or the fifth month, when the ultrasound showed we were having a girl? Or the sixth month, when we renovated this room? Or the seventh month, when we began searching for private schools? Or the eighth month, when we had the baby shower and all our friends and all our family came to this house and showered us with gifts and shared in our joy? Not then. After. A month ago. Is that right? Do I have the timeline right?

VIVIAN
Yes.

DEVLIN
Why?

VIVIAN
Why.

DEVLIN
Yes, why? What happened a month ago?

VIVIAN
Nothing happened.

DEVLIN
Nothing?

VIVIAN
No. Nothing happened. I just...I just got scared. One day I woke up. Scared. And I thought it would pass. I had moments of fear before and they always passed.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)

I always found something to fill up the day, to channel my energy into, to fix me up. But this time it didn't pass. There was nothing to do. It had all been done. And now I had to face it. To sit with it. All day. Every day. And it didn't pass. It never passed.

DEVLIN

Why? What are you afraid of?

VIVIAN

*(pointing an accusing hand at
Alexandra)*

That! I'm afraid of that!

DEVLIN

But why?

VIVIAN

STOP ASKING ME WHY! NO MORE QUESTIONS! I don't *know* why! I don't have to know why! I'm not a man! A man always has to know *why* he feels something! I'm a woman! I'm allowed to feel whatever I want and I don't have to know why!

Pause.

DEVLIN

Okay. Fine. Take her.

Beat.

VIVIAN

Don't patronize me, Devlin.

DEVLIN

I'm not. Take her.

Pause.

VIVIAN

Do you mean that?

DEVLIN

No more questions. That's your rule. Enough questions. Take her back. She doesn't suit you. You don't want her. Take her back.

VIVIAN

If you think you're being clever, you're sadly mistaken. I will do it.

DEVLIN

So do it.

I'm the mother. VIVIAN

You are. DEVLIN

I have the right. VIVIAN

You do. DEVLIN

The law is quite clear. VIVIAN

I've no doubt. DEVLIN

Pause.

If you're thinking of...interfering with me, you had better think again. VIVIAN

I've no idea what you mean. DEVLIN

I'm not afraid of you, Devlin. VIVIAN

Of course you're not. DEVLIN

You can't stop me. VIVIAN

Actually, I can. I won't. But I can. DEVLIN

You're not stronger than me. VIVIAN

Beat.

Oh yes I am. I am infinitely stronger than you. DEVLIN

You know what I meant. VIVIAN

You meant *in body*. Stronger in body. DEVLIN

VIVIAN

Yes.

DEVLIN

I am stronger than you in body too.

VIVIAN

Not much. Not enough.

DEVLIN

Perhaps. No matter. I've never raised a hand to you and I never will. *(Pause.)* I will not interfere with you. You have my word. *(Pause.)* Go on. Take her.

Vivian sees that Devlin is sincere. She turns to Alexandra. Takes a step toward her. Looks down on her. Eyes her evenly, calmly, coldly.

She decides to take her.

She glances about the room.

VIVIAN

Where is her carrier?

DEVLIN

It's in the car.

VIVIAN

Bring it to me.

DEVLIN

No.

VIVIAN

No?

DEVLIN

No.

VIVIAN

Then I'll go and get it.

DEVLIN

And I'll smash it into a thousand pieces.

VIVIAN

You'll do no such thing.

DEVLIN

I'll pulverize it into a fine powder.

VIVIAN

You gave me your word.

DEVLIN

I said I would not interfere with you and I will not. I will let you take her freely. But not in a basket. You're going have to carry her.

VIVIAN

Oh, am I?

DEVLIN

Yes, my dear. I'll open the door for you. I'll drive you. I'll escort you. But you are going to have to pick her up. In your arms. And carry her.

VIVIAN

You think I can't do that?

DEVLIN

You haven't yet.

VIVIAN

Of course I have.

DEVLIN

No. You haven't. You never held her yesterday in the hospital after she was born.

VIVIAN

I was too weak.

DEVLIN

You never held her today. Here. In our home.

VIVIAN

So. That means nothing.

DEVLIN

Fine. It means nothing. So hold her now. Oh. I'm sorry. I forgot. You're afraid of her.

VIVIAN

Don't mock me.

DEVLIN

But you said so yourself. You are afraid of this little girl. This baby. This miracle.

VIVIAN

She's not a miracle, Devlin. She's just a small person. Just another person, like any other. And if there is one thing of which I am certain, it is this: people are not miracles.

DEVLIN
She's special. And you know it.

VIVIAN
She is not special.

DEVLIN
You heard her.

VIVIAN
She's not special, Devlin. She's a freak.

DEVLIN
Watch your mouth.

VIVIAN
She's an aberration.

DEVLIN
Don't you dare--

VIVIAN
And let's face it, Devlin. She's...ugly.

DEVLIN
(advancing on her instantly)
YOU SHUT YOUR FUCKING MOUTH!

Vivian retreats, just a step, then holds her ground.

VIVIAN
Don't touch me.

Devlin stops short of her. His blood is up, but he composes himself. He boils, but maintains control.

DEVLIN
No one speaks a word against my daughter. No one. Not even you.

VIVIAN
You lay one hand on me and I'll tear your throat out.

Devlin smirks. He steps back.

DEVLIN
Pick her up.

Vivian does not move. Devlin moves further back, giving her free passage to the crib.

DEVLIN

Go on. Pick her up.

Vivian takes a moment to satisfy herself that Devlin will not harm her. Takes another moment to steady her nerves. Finally, she moves decisively to the crib. She looks down at Alexandra. Again, coldly.

Then, with clinical detachment, she picks Alexandra up and holds her out at arms length. She studies Alexandra, with a slight look of disgust, as though the baby were a specimen of unknown origin. After some examination, she does what she has to do--she holds Alexandra close in her arms.

Instantly, Vivian gasps.

A moment passes.

A glow of light--soft, transcendent--encircles mother and child.

Vivian falls in love with her daughter.

From the baby, comes a sound: soft music. The sound of Vivian's love mixing with Alexandra's. The sound of home. The sound Alexandra makes knowing that she is safe.

The universe shifts beneath Vivian's feet--Alexandra is now the center of the world.

Vivian weeps. In joy. And fear. But mostly joy.

Music continues throughout, straight through the end of the play. Soft. Clear. Bright and shining with new hope.

VIVIAN

Oh, my love! My precious little girl! Please forgive me! I was so wrong! I was a fool! A terrible, awful fool! I love you so much! I've never loved like this before! I never knew such love was even possible! Oh, my darling girl, can you ever forgive me?

She continues to weep. Devlin steps forward and, delicately, places a hand on Vivian.

DEVLIN

Of course she will.

Vivian turns to him, somewhat surprised. She had forgotten he was there. She sees him, and her heart melts further still.

VIVIAN

Oh, Devlin, my love. Look at our baby girl! Isn't she beautiful?

DEVLIN

She's the most beautiful sight I've ever seen.

VIVIAN

She is. She truly is. Did you even believe such beauty could exist in this ugly world?

DEVLIN

I hoped it could.

VIVIAN

I hoped it could too, but I never believed. I never really believed anything could be so beautiful. Look at her.

They look at her. At the beauty of her.

DEVLIN

She looks just like her mother.

VIVIAN

Oh, no. She is so much more beautiful than I ever was. Look at her face. Look at her eyes.

Vivian looks into Alexandra's eyes. A sudden realization.

VIVIAN

(shocked)

I'm a mother.

DEVLIN

Yes, you are.

VIVIAN

It just hit me. I'm a mother.

DEVLIN

No just a mother. *Her* mother.

VIVIAN
Oh, Devlin. I've never felt so alive in my life.

DEVLIN
You're glowing.

VIVIAN
Am I?

DEVLIN
Having a baby will do that to you.

VIVIAN
Having a baby will do that to you. Yes. Yes. Alexandra has made me glow. And more than that. So much more. I feel so...strong.

DEVLIN
Strong? Really?

VIVIAN
Oh, yes. I've never felt so strong in my life.

DEVLIN
You are strong, my love.

VIVIAN
I feel like I have the strength of a thousand men. Here. Take my hand. *(He takes her hand.)* Do you feel that?

A moment. Devlin feels something. A pulse of the supernatural.

DEVLIN
Yes.

VIVIAN
Do you feel it?

THIS IS NOT THE END OF THE PLAY,
BUT IT IS THE END OF YOUR FREE SAMPLE.

To read the rest of the play and/or to obtain production rights,
email rhettmartinez@icloud.com.