

*This scene is excerpted from the middle of the play and takes place on the back deck of Joan Harper's lake house. Joan has just had a testy exchange with her attorney-daughter, Allison, and has gone inside the house, leaving Allison alone outdoors with Lloyd Westcott, who is gay, an architecture professor, and an old family friend.*

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LLOYD. (*Crosses slowly to Downstage edge of observation deck. Speaks from behind counter top.*) Your mother seems to think you “need” me.

ALLISON. (*Looking Out to horizon.*) She's been wrong before, but she may be right about that.

LLOYD. Anything you'd like to share with me, Allie? I'm a pretty good listener. (*Notes propped-up textbook, picks it up, idly pages through it.*)

ALLISON. You're a very good listener—unlike some people.

LLOYD. Your mother loves you. It's unconditional. (*During following speech, LLOYD will notice inscription at front of book, read it, react with a concerned grimace, then close book and set it facedown on counter.*)

ALLISON. (*Still looking Out.*) “Unconditional love.” It sounds so selfless and pure, like a dog's love. Jupiter would slobber all over you and nuzzle your hand and look at you with those big deep, pleading eyes that wanted nothing in return, except maybe a smile or a rub behind the ears. But when a *person* offers unconditional love, there's more to it. It has strings. It carries overtones of . . . *entitlement*. And who could feel more entitled than your own mother? Those biological ties are ties that bind. I'm nearly thirty years old, but in her eyes, I'm *still* her child and always will be. I'm . . . *hers*.

LLOYD. (*Crosses Downstage and sits next to her.*) (*wryly*) Something wrong with that, Miss Independence?

ALLISON. I just need some space . . . some distance.

LLOYD. You live in Illinois. You work in Chicago. Joan is hardly “in your face.”

ALLISON. (*to herself*) Chicago's not so far away . . .

LLOYD. We *endure* our parents, Allie. Then they die. And then *we* wonder what went wrong.

ALLISON. (*Pats his hand.*) You're wise beyond your years.

LLOYD. No, I'm not. I just *happen* to have a unique perspective on you and Joan. I was thinking about this during the drive up on Sunday. You'll be thirty next year; Joan recently turned sixty. At forty-six, I'm smack in the middle—too old to be Joan's child, too young to be your parent, or even an uncle.

ALLISON. So maybe you're a big brother—I'd like that.

LLOYD. (*Shakes his head.*) But we're not related. So our friendship is "pure," untainted by—what was your word?—entitlement. We don't owe each other any of the affection or allegiance demanded by blood. Instead, we can simply be drawn to each other as kindred spirits. And the same is true of my friendship with Joan. In my eyes, you're on exactly the same footing.

ALLISON. *That's* a sobering thought.

LLOYD. Then there's Geoffrey, for instance.

ALLISON. (*warily*) Yes . . . ?

LLOYD. That's a pure friendship, offering unconditional love. After all, you're not related.

ALLISON. He's my *husband*.

LLOYD. Correct. Point is, your marriage is a matter of mutual choice, not a quirk of your bloodlines.

ALLISON. (*Shrugs.*) Okay. So what's the issue? (*Good-natured, not snotty.*) When you grilled me about the identity of my best friend, I said it was Geoff.

LLOYD. (*slowly, meaningfully*) But you hesitated.

ALLISON. I'm a lawyer. I choose my words with care.

LLOYD. The same way you buffaloed Brooke with that tap dance about *who's* best friends with *whom*?

ALLISON. That was *different*. Brooke needed to hear what she needed to hear.

LLOYD. And Geoffrey didn't?

ALLISON. You heard him—he sounded *surprised* by my answer.

LLOYD. And *you* sounded equally surprised that *he* was surprised. I heard a note of insecurity in your voice. The two of you didn't seem to be quite—how shall we put it?—"on the same page." And after how many years?

ALLISON. You're reading *far* too much into this.

LLOYD. Am I? Hope so.

ALLISON. (*Rises, grinning, standing on beach.*) You're starting to sound like *her*, you know.

LLOYD. (*falsetto*) Sometimes it's a struggle to keep my voice—(*basso profundo*)—in it's natural register.

ALLISON. (*Laughing.*) Ah, Lloyd, you always manage to lighten my mood.

LLOYD. Your mood often seems to require it.

ALLISON. You know very well I wasn't referring to your voice. It was the message—*Mom's* message. She seems convinced that Geoff and I have some "underlying problem."

LLOYD. Well, *do* you?

ALLISON. *No.* (*Crosses Left to chaise, reconsidering.*) At least I don't *think* so. Geoff and I are *good* together. If we had a problem, we'd analyze it, then fix it. (*Retrieves the iced tea she had left on table near chaise. Sips it.*)

LLOYD. (*Mimicking.*) "We'd analyze it, then fix it." The lawyer and the scientist. The two of you—it's all about "method," isn't it?

ALLISON. (*Sits on chaise, facing Right.*) Largely, yes.

LLOYD. (*Rises, standing on beach, facing ALLISON.*) Allie, method is fine. Technique is a laudable skill. And analysis makes possible some of the greatest leaps of the human mind—that's how we build buildings, cure diseases, and keep planes in the air. But analysis, technique, and method are all governed by logic. And sometimes, in affairs of the heart, logic just doesn't apply. To an extent, sure, we can calm our emotions, but ultimately, we're incapable of ruling our affections or taming our love.

ALLISON. (*Sets tea down.*) (*quietly, seriously*) I do love Geoff, deeply. You know that, don't you, Lloyd?

LLOYD. (*Crossing Left to her, sitting next to her on chaise.*) Of course, Allie. I applauded your engagement; I attended your wedding.

ALLISON. (*Reminding him.*) You threw me a *shower*.

LLOYD. Ah, yes—*white* bunting.

ALLISON. And that love is as solid as it ever was.

LLOYD. Love is one thing. A successful marriage is another.

ALLISON. (*skeptically*) You'll need to explain that.

LLOYD. It's obvious, isn't it? Love is . . . lovely; I'm not knocking it. But it doesn't pay the bills, it doesn't stop you from growing older, and it doesn't prevent

boredom from setting in once the infatuation wears off.

ALLISON. Geoff and I were never *infatuated*. We just . . . eased into it.

LLOYD. I hesitate to say it, but that doesn't surprise me in the least.

ALLISON. (*With feigned umbrage.*) And why not?

LLOYD. (*Takes her hand.*) Try not to take this the wrong way: you were never infatuated because you lack passion.

ALLISON. (*dryly*) There's a *right* way to take that?

LLOYD. There is. You're a levelheaded woman, Allie. You're smart, capable, and confident. You proceed directly from point A to point B without detours or sightseeing. You get things done. You accomplish your goals. No nonsense. No funny stuff.

ALLISON. I'm humorless, *too*, huh? (*Cracks a smile.*)

LLOYD. (*sincerely*) You have a delightful sense of humor. But you never let it cloud your mission. And maybe *that's* why Geoff was so surprised to learn that you consider him your best friend. Perhaps you've treated him more like a *partner* than a spouse . . . or a friend.

ALLISON. (*Hangs head.*) It was easier, Lloyd, when I could simply resent the closeness he shares with Mom. But lack of passion? (*Sigh of defeat.*) I'm not even sure what you mean.

LLOYD. A passionate relationship involves more than teamwork—or sex. It means deeply, truly *caring* for one another, as if you held each other's life in your hands.

ALLISON. That's how I *do* feel about Geoff. But if I don't show it, well, that sounds suspiciously like *my* fault.

LLOYD. It has nothing to do with "fault"—yours, Geoffrey's, or Joan's. It has everything to do with self-awareness . . . and openness.

ALLISON. (*With comic dismay.*) Openness? In *this* family? Don't kid yourself. We all have our secrets—and we *like* it that way!

LLOYD. All right, *Venus*. You've already done a bit of soul-baring today, so I guess that's progress. But it was an open secret anyway.

ALLISON. You're a fine one to lecture, *Percival*.

LLOYD. My name was *not* Percival.

ALLISON. But it fits.

LLOYD. Thanks!

ALLISON. I sorta like it.

LLOYD. So did Brooke.

ALLISON. (*Hesitates.*) Uh, speaking of Brooke, there's something I do need to tell you.

LLOYD. More secrets? Don't tell me—let me guess—Brooke wears men's underthings.

ALLISON. (*Grinning but pleading.*) Lloyd, *listen*. Brooke has just offered me an important promotion in the firm.

LLOYD. That's fabulous news, Allie. Congratulations.

ALLISON. (*Shaking her head.*) But the position is with the *Seattle* office.

LLOYD. Oops. So that's the, uh, "decision" you're tussling with.

ALLISON. (*Nods.*) And she needs an answer today. Geoff doesn't know about it; neither does Mom. Geoff's teaching career is in full swing now. He's up for tenure. He can't just up and traipse off with me, moving cross-country; I know that. So if I go—(*soberly*)—that's probably the end of "us."

LLOYD. Knowing Geoff, he might just go with you.

ALLISON. (*Whining.*) I know . . . ! But then *I'd* be to blame for screwing up his career. And Mom would *never* forgive me for taking him away.

LLOYD. Joan wouldn't like losing *you* either, Allie.

ALLISON. (*Despondent.*) She wouldn't care. You heard her just now. Besides, she's so wrapped up in her fantasies about Dad, the distance might be good for us.

LLOYD. (*sincerely, soothingly*) I'm sure that's not the case. But you do have some rough decisions ahead. If you need me, I'm always happy to listen.

(*JOAN enters Up Left from kitchen.*)

JOAN. (*Looking around.*) Where *is* everyone? This is supposed to be a party.

ALLISON. (*Rises, crosses Right to main deck.*) Scattered to the four winds, Mom. Have you seen my, uh . . . partner?

JOAN. (*Confused.*) Brooke?

ALLISON. No, Mom. Geoff.

JOAN. He went out to the car, but that was a few minutes ago. Not sure what he's doing. (*Turning to LLOYD.*) The champagne is still in the fridge. Should I

bring it out?

LLOYD. (*Standing.*) Sure, Joan. Let's put it on ice.

(*JOAN exits Up Left into kitchen.*)

ALLISON. (*Turns to LLOYD, smiles.*) You were right, Lloyd. You *are* a good listener.

LLOYD. You had plenty to *tell*. When do you plan to tell the others?

ALLISON. Others?

LLOYD. Joan? Geoff? *Seattle*?

ALLISON. (*pragmatically*) I don't know *when* I'll tell them because I don't know *what* I'll tell them.

LLOYD. Then maybe you should just talk to them about it. The clock is ticking—can't you hear it? The persistent, pestering pendulum of fate—it's strokes are downright deafening.

ALLISON. (*Grinning.*) Nate's had a good influence on you, Lloyd. You seem to be full of poetry this morning.

LLOYD. (*Crosses Right to her.*) Brooke says I'm full of shit.

ALLISON. True enough, but I still think you're sweet. (*Gives him a quick kiss.*)

LLOYD. (*comically, nasally*) Sweet, sweet Percival.

ALLISON. (*Moving Upstage toward house.*) I'd better go see what's keeping Geoff.

LLOYD. Good idea. (*Gestures toward sun.*) (*dramatically, à la Karloff*) The egress draws nigh.