

Vino Veritas

by David MacGregor

Vino Veritas

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Published 2010, Third Edition

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Originally produced by The Purple Rose Theatre Company (2008)

Jeff Daniels, Executive Director

Guy Sanville, Artistic Director

Alan Ribant, Managing Director

The production was directed by Guy Sanville.

Vino Veritas premiered at The Purple Rose Theatre Company in Chelsea, Michigan, on January 25, 2008. The play was directed by Guy Sanville; the set design was by Daniel C. Walker; the costume design was by Christianne Myers; the lighting design was by Dana White; the sound design was by Quintessa Gallinat; the properties design was by Danna Segrest; and the stage manager was Michelle DiDomenico. The cast was as follows:

LAUREN Suzi Regan
PHIL..... Phil Powers
RIDLEY Tommy A. Gomez
CLAIREQuetta Carpenter

CHARACTERS

LAUREN professional photographer, 30s-40s
PHIL photographer husband of LAUREN, 30s-40s
RIDLEY physician, 30s-40s
CLAIRE wife of RIDLEY and stay-at-home mom, 30s-40s

PLACE

an upper-middle class living room

TIME

the present; Halloween evening

Vino Veritas

ACT ONE

The living room has a sofa, coffee table, armchair, and an inviting pile of pillows or soft furniture. There is also a side table or sideboard that is well-stocked with liquor bottles. On a level above and behind the living room (or in an adjacent kitchen/dining area) is a dining room table. There is a flight of stairs leading up to a second floor, a door that leads outside and a fireplace. The house is extravagantly decorated for Halloween, and there are two bags of Halloween candy strewn all over the floor. LAUREN enters, harried and frazzled, and sets the table. Silverware clatters to the floor.

LAUREN Jesus Christ! (*picks it up and then bangs her head on the underside of the table*) Goddammit!

She moves into the living room, trying to create order out of chaos. She pulls a putter from beneath the sofa and sets it among the fireplace tools, then sweeps magazines off the coffee table and puts them underneath it. A packet of photos catches her eye and as she opens it up, the energy drains out of her. She sits down and leafs through the photos. PHIL enters, carrying a bag of groceries.

PHIL I'm home! Returned from the fields! (*looks up the stairs*) I said I'm home! The deed is done! Provisions have been acquired! Lauren? I'm home! Chop, chop, we need to get ready for the big — oh, there you are! I'm home.

LAUREN So I gathered.

PHIL I got everything! The milk, eggs, cheddar cheese, Triscuits, smoked oysters, and I got the boys that glow-in-the-dark yogurt they like.

LAUREN Amazing. You're like a border collie on two legs, you know that?

PHIL I'll take that as a compliment. But would a border collie get this? (*pulls out some cans of soda*)

LAUREN Mountain Dew XXX Rush?

PHIL You didn't even know this was out there, did you? But I —

LAUREN & PHIL — saw it in a commercial.

PHIL It's really annoying when you do that.

LAUREN puts the photos down, gets up and begins cleaning up the Halloween candy on the floor.

LAUREN Not half as annoying as being able to do it so often.

PHIL Hey, you've got to keep up with the times.

LAUREN No. No, I don't.

PHIL spots some candy he likes and helps himself.

PHIL Lauren, will you please lighten up? I just dropped the kids at your sister's and Ridley and Claire will be over any minute now. We'll have some wine, some appetizers and then we're going to the most fabulous Halloween party in the entire city, okay? Theoretically, that means we should be able to have a marginally engaging time.

LAUREN I can't believe they didn't clean this up. No Christmas! No Christmas!

PHIL Have you at least decided what you're going as?

LAUREN Why, yes I have. Thank you for asking. I'll be going as a complete and utter psycho bitch.

PHIL Great. So, what are you going to do with the money you saved on a costume?

LAUREN Well, I was thinking. You know what we need in our living room? A guillotine. A real, live, operational guillotine.

PHIL I think we have more than enough decorations

up.

LAUREN No, I don't mean just for Halloween. I mean permanently. I think it would give us some perspective. It would help keep the kids in line too. I've had it with the "you're grounded, no TV, no food for a month" routine.

PHIL Uh-huh.

LAUREN I have come to the conclusion that kids behave better if they think one of their parents is flat-out nuts. It keeps them on their toes. That's why we need a guillotine.

PHIL I'll check e-Bay first thing tomorrow. I bet I find one. A buddy of mine, this is like five years ago, he got some dirt from John Wayne Gacy's crawlspace on e-Bay. True story. *(starts whistling as he puts the groceries away)*

LAUREN Why are you in such a good mood?

PHIL I'm not in a good mood.

LAUREN Yes, you are. You're in a good mood.

PHIL I'm not! Really. That's ridiculous. Why would I be in a good mood?

LAUREN Tell me.

PHIL It's nothing.

LAUREN Oh my God.

PHIL You don't want to know.

LAUREN Trust me, I never want to know. But you're going to tell me anyway because it will drive me crazy if you don't.

PHIL It's no big deal. It's just, you know, that thing I kind of keep track of. That animal thing.

LAUREN And today is ... ?

PHIL Right.

LAUREN Should I even ask?

PHIL I wish you wouldn't.

LAUREN Just tell me and get it over with. I need to check on the hors d'oeuvres.

PHIL All right, if you absolutely have to know ... polar bear.

LAUREN Polar bear.

PHIL As of today, I have lived longer than the oldest polar bear ever. If that's not a good reason to be a little bit perky, I don't know what is. And get this. In a few months, I'm going to pass up the oldest baboon.

LAUREN You know, I remember being a little girl, I must have been in third grade or so. And it was a rainy day at school, so we had indoor recess and I was at this table talking to the other girls about the men we were going to marry ... doctors, astronauts, baseball players. But as I recall, there wasn't one girl who wanted to marry a man whose goal in life was to live longer than a baboon.

PHIL Hey, would it help if I told you that you're older than the oldest camel ever?

LAUREN I just ... maybe it's me. Maybe it's some kind of mental defect on my part. But your fascination with the most trivial and bizarre things imaginable is beyond me.

PHIL You're right. I'm a freak. A total, unredeemable, stone-cold freak. I have no business being married to anyone.

LAUREN Now you tell me.

PHIL I've been telling you that for years. When I was a kid my idea of a good time wasn't hanging out with my buddies or dating girls. It was sitting in my basement memorizing *The Guinness Book of World Records*. There is no way I should ever have been allowed to mate or breed. So are the pizza puffs ready?

LAUREN I decided to go with something different tonight. *Quinotto de hongos y camarones*.

PHIL What the hell is that?

LAUREN It's a Peruvian dish. Quinoa with shrimp in a clam broth.

PHIL So, what you're saying is ... no pizza puffs.

LAUREN That's what I'm saying. Don't you think it's time you elevated your palate a little?

PHIL Well, I'm sorry the things I like aren't really expensive and hard to make. But the fact is, pizza puffs are delicious. So are Big Macs and Hershey bars. That's

why they make millions of them. People like them. You need to be a little more in touch with the common man. Or woman.

LAUREN Give me another forty years and I'm sure I will be.

PHIL Why forty years?

LAUREN Because by then I'll be so old my brain will be leaking out my ears. And at that point I'm sure I'll be able to sit down with a big pile of pizza puffs and enjoy reruns of *Friends* and *Home Improvement*.

PHIL You know what your problem is? You don't expose yourself to enough culture.

LAUREN What culture? A bunch of single idiots perpetually dating one another on TV? A bunch of acrobatic idiots jumping around with guns in movies? A bunch of hermaphroditic cancer victims with Alzheimer's in theatre? How people can watch any of that crap is beyond me.

PHIL Sweetheart. Darling. Let's try to remember that other people are entitled to their opinion.

LAUREN Sure they are. But let's try to remember that some opinions are completely stupid!

PHIL Oy. You're on a roll tonight. I just wish you'd told me about the quinoa dish because I'd have got something to go with it. You know Ridley, he's a maniac for what wine goes best with what food.

LAUREN Well, don't get your little oenophile panties in a bunch, Phil. We already have the perfect beverage in the house.

PHIL We do? I'm guessing you're not talking about the XXX Mountain Dew, right?

LAUREN No. I had something a little more festive in mind.
(pulls a box from a cupboard and sets it before PHIL)

PHIL I thought you threw that out.

LAUREN Apparently not.

PHIL You told me you threw it out.

LAUREN Did I?

PHIL I asked you specifically if you threw it out and

you said, “Yes Phil, I threw it out.”

LAUREN I was just giving you the answer you wanted. You should be familiar with that phenomenon.

PHIL For chrissakes, Lauren! It was bad enough bringing that back from Peru, but ... oh no. You're not suggesting we serve that to Ridley and Claire?

LAUREN Why not?

PHIL Why not? Do I really have to explain why not?

LAUREN Phil, you know the rest of tonight is completely predictable. Ridley will talk about his perfect practice, Claire will talk about their perfect kids, then we'll go to a perfect party to watch perfect people in perfect costumes bobbing for perfect apples in a tub full of Bombay Sapphire Gin. This would spice things up a little.

PHIL Sure. In a multiple homicide kind of way.

LAUREN Don't be ridiculous. I think Ridley and Claire would be up for it. Besides, they're our best friends, who else are we going to try it with?

PHIL I'll get you the guillotine. I swear to God. And the way things are going around here, I'll be the first volunteer. But please put that away.

LAUREN Where has your sense of adventure gone? Can I remind you that at some point back in the swirling mists of time we were both freelance photographers and pretty damned good photographers at that? Remember swimming with hammerhead sharks off The Great Barrier Reef? Climbing Mt. Pumori in Nepal? For chrissakes Phil, you almost died in a lava field in Hawaii because you wanted to get one more shot. That's what made me fall in love with you, the sheer passion you had for what we were doing.

PHIL Yeah, well, we're still photographers, Lauren. That's why we own a portrait studio with our name on it.

LAUREN Taking pictures of weddings and babies? You're satisfied with that? Just how many more chicken dances and howling two-year-olds do you need to capture, Phil?

PHIL It's a business. We've got a mortgage to pay.

We've got two kids we want to put through college. And yes, people will pay more for a picture of little Sammy cuddling his favorite teddy bear than they'll pay for a shot of sea turtles coming on shore in the Galapagos.

LAUREN All I want is to add a little bit of excitement and adventure to our evening. Is that asking so much?

PHIL No! I love excitement and adventure!

LAUREN Phil, these days your idea of excitement is taking the boys out for ice cream after a soccer game.

PHIL With sprinkles. Don't forget the sprinkles. And very exciting multicolored sprinkles, I might add.

LAUREN You don't hear a word I'm saying, do you? When I speak, it must be like a damned dog whistle to you!

PHIL Lauren, what do you want me to tell you? Circumstances change.

LAUREN So do people. You want to know how naive I am? How clueless I am? I thought our trip to Peru might change things, I really did. I thought we would get away from the kids for a week, explore an exotic new country, and maybe, just maybe, I might see a spark of the person you used to be.

PHIL How was Peru supposed to do that?

LAUREN I thought you'd be a little inspired, all right? I thought we'd get some great shots in Lima of Casa Aliaga, the Correo Central or the Plaza de Armas. And remember when we got to the Inca ruins in the Sacred Valley? It was all I could do not to drop to my knees and weep it was so beautiful. That incredible green moss on the stones, the mist rising like a veil all around us as we stood at the top of the world. I'm snapping away like a madwoman — The Temple of the Sun, the water ritual fountains, the Ollantaytambo Stonework ... (*hands the packet of photos to PHIL*) ... and then I looked at the photos you took. Two pictures of donkeys wearing hats and the rest are of me at the hotel in Lima.

PHIL I knew the boys would be way more interested in donkeys wearing hats than a bunch of old stones. And the rest are of you because you're still the most

beautiful thing I have ever seen.

LAUREN Oh, for Christ's sake.

PHIL I'm serious.

LAUREN After ten years and two kids? Right. You just wanted a photo of me doing something stupid to make the boys laugh.

PHIL Lauren, I swear —

LAUREN You want to blow smoke? Blow smoke for our customers when they bring in the ugliest baby in the history of humanity. But let's face it, Phil. Whatever you had, you lost.

PHIL *(shoves the packet of photos into a drawer)*
Lauren, I take photographs for a living! When I go on vacation, guess what I don't want to do?

LAUREN You're a different man than the one I married.

PHIL Of course I'm different! For one thing, we're not twenty-five years old anymore! For another thing, we have two kids! I'm sorry I didn't go cartwheeling down the side of a pyramid to get just the right shot, but I think we have an obligation to Brandon and Zack to stay alive for a couple more years.

LAUREN So we put our lives on hold? Is that what we do? We stop living?

PHIL No! We just got back from Peru, didn't we?

LAUREN Ten days! Ten days in the past three years. And then it's back to the PTA and doing laundry and those insane women down the block who keep asking me if I want to join their goddamn scrapbooking club! I used to look forward to my life, Phil. God help me, I did. I used to wonder what the next week, what the next month would bring. Now, I wake up every morning and I just try to get through the day.

PHIL And you don't think scrapbooking is the answer? I hear they've got these incredible new pinking shears that —

LAUREN glares at him.

PHIL I'm joking. That's a joke. That's what people do.

They make jokes to get through the day.

LAUREN And is that the only goal we have now? To get through the day? I swear to God, from the moment I open my eyes in the morning, I'm thinking, "Is that a nail pop in the ceiling? Does the vacuum cleaner need a new bag? Why is the washing machine moving six inches across the floor every time I use it? Did I get my car in for an oil change? Did I sign Zack's field trip permission slip? Is Brandon falling behind in science because we're not helping him with his homework? Are we saving enough? Is my mother going to call me with some bizarre demand?" And on and on and on and on and on! I can't go on like this.

PHIL What are you saying?

LAUREN This can't be my life.

And as they stare across the lifetime of their relationship, the doorbell rings. It rings again. And then rings rapidly.

PHIL They're here.

PHIL answers the door. RIDLEY enters, dressed as a doctor.

RIDLEY Her majesty, the Queen.

CLAIRE enters, dressed as Queen Elizabeth I of England. She extends her hand to PHIL.

PHIL Your highness.

PHIL kisses CLAIRE's hand, then shakes hands with RIDLEY.

CLAIRE Ohmygosh! Look at all these decorations! You guys really went all out this year!

LAUREN Well, you know Brandon and Zack. They're crazy about Halloween. It's a bigger deal than Christmas to them.

PHIL Claire, that is a major-league costume! Jesus! Just absolutely amazing! Now help me out here. Mary Queen of Scots?

CLAIRE *(adopting a faux British accent)* Heavens no, my good man. I am Queen Elizabeth I of England. The fifth and final monarch in the Tudor Dynasty, I ruled from 1558 until 1603 and was popularly known as the Virgin Queen.

LAUREN It's a gorgeous costume, Claire. Very authentic looking. And we'll give you a pass on the virgin part.

CLAIRE You know, just for fun I tried to see if I could find any Virgin Kings in the history books. No such thing. Or if there were, they didn't brag about it.

PHIL And Ridley, you're a ... ?

RIDLEY I'm a doctor.

PHIL I know. You are a doctor.

RIDLEY Right.

PHIL So how is that a costume if you're really a doctor?

RIDLEY Well, it's kind of a postmodern ironic commentary. Plus, I'm on call for another couple of hours. So, kind of killing two birds with one stone. But why aren't you guys dressed?

PHIL We're running a little behind. I'll go get ready.

PHIL grabs the box off the coffee table before LAUREN can get there and runs upstairs with it.

LAUREN I'll get the hors d'oeuvres.

LAUREN brings out the quinoa dish and some glasses as RIDLEY and CLAIRE cuddle lovingly on the sofa.

CLAIRE I am so looking forward to the Halloween party this year. Do you think I have a chance at best costume?

LAUREN I don't see why not. You've won it the past five years in a row.

LAUREN hands RIDLEY a bottle of wine to open.

CLAIRE I know. The pressure's on! I've been researching Elizabethan fashions for the past three months. Colors, fabrics, styles. I ended up basing this costume on

“The Phoenix Portrait,” attributed to Nicholas Hibbard from around 1575, but I’m worried that the stone in this pendant isn’t quite dark enough.

A thumping noise makes LAUREN look up the stairs.

LAUREN It’s lovely. Really.

RIDLEY Isn’t she something? Half the people at that party just throw on any old crap they have lying around the house and call it a costume. But not Claire.

RIDLEY and CLAIRE rub their noses together like lovestruck puppies.

PHIL (o.s.) Yee-haw, pardners! *(charges down the stairs in a full-fledged cowboy outfit, dismounts from an invisible horse, swings a lariat over his head, then lassoes CLAIRE and pulls her towards him)* Come along, little dogie! They say that Wyoming will be your new home!

CLAIRE I’d love to go to Wyoming!

PHIL *(unties CLAIRE and turns to LAUREN)* Git now, you frisky little filly! Mosey on up them stairs and get your costume duds on! *(swings the lasso over his head)*

LAUREN Listen here, cowboy. You lasso me with that thing and we’re going to have ourselves a little gelding party.

PHIL’s lasso droops as LAUREN hustles upstairs.

PHIL Okay. That’ll take the bang out of your six-shooter.

RIDLEY So, Phil, what’s this dish?

PHIL That? Oh, it’s, uh, Peruvian Hongeronies ... or something like that. Kind of an ancient Inca dish, I guess. I’m not too sure. Lauren made it.

CLAIRE How was Peru? We haven’t seen either of you since you got back.

PHIL Nice. Nice. A little remote, you know. Not too many convenience stores. And I looked, believe me.

You get into that rain forest for a couple of days and you are ready to kill for a Slurpee and a Ding Dong.

RIDLEY Phil, they shouldn't let you out of suburbia. You'll hurt yourself.

CLAIRE He's kidding, Ridley. He wasn't really looking for Slurpees in the rain forest.

PHIL Say, you're pretty sharp. I like that in a virgin. Wait. No, I don't.

CLAIRE I'd laugh, but we virgins don't have any sense of humor.

PHIL I can see why.

CLAIRE So, did you visit Machu Picchu?

PHIL reacts to the sound of a thump from upstairs.

PHIL I'm sorry. What?

CLAIRE Machu Picchu. The Lost City of the Incas. It's in the Andes Mountains.

PHIL Oh yeah! Yeah, we saw that. Hey, did you guys ever hear that song, "From the Indies to the Andes in his Undies?" No? It's a good one.

(singing) From the Indies to the Andes in his undies

Twas a very, very daring thing to do

And he carried for a spare pair of panties

But they didn't fit him well, they were his auntie's.

RIDLEY I can't say I'm familiar.

PHIL I used to sing it to the kids in the bathtub all the time. They love that kind of stuff. You know, anything about underwear or passing gas ...

A scraping sound from upstairs makes PHIL look up.

PHIL Hey, do you guys know what a "beemf" is? No? It's somebody who farts in the bathtub, then bites the bubbles. Yeah, my grandpa told me that one. The funny thing is, he didn't have any teeth. You need drinks! I'm going to get you some drinks!

LAUREN *(o.s.)* Let me take care of the drinks. *(descends the stairs in a gorgeous witch costume, holding the box)*

CLAIRE Oh Lauren! I love your costume! It is so you!

PHIL You have no idea.
CLAIRE Now are you a good witch or a bad witch?
LAUREN That remains to be seen.
RIDLEY What's in the box?
LAUREN What any self-respecting witch has in her box. A
 magic potion.
PHIL (*sidles up close to LAUREN*) How did you know
 where I hid that?
LAUREN I know where you hide everything. (*turns to*
 RIDLEY) In fact, this magic potion should be especially
 interesting to you, Ridley. It's actually a wine. The single
 most bizarre and incredible wine on the planet.
RIDLEY Really? Let me guess. Red or white?
LAUREN Neither.

*LAUREN takes off her witch's shawl, drapes it across
the coffee table, and sets the box on top of it. She
then escorts RIDLEY to the chair and CLAIRE to the
pile of pillows.*

RIDLEY Neither? Oh, I know! I just read about it in *Wine
Spectator*. It's a Zweigelt Rosé!
LAUREN No. You won't find this wine listed in any
 magazine. And you won't find it in any store or any
 restaurant.
RIDLEY Where is it from?
LAUREN We picked it up in Peru.
PHIL Lauren picked it up in Peru. I had nothing to do
 with it.
CLAIRE I was just asking Phil if you'd seen Machu
 Picchu.
LAUREN Oh, absolutely. If there was an Inca ruin, we saw
 it. And Machu Picchu is amazing, but —
PHIL Not amazing enough for Lauren, as it turned
 out.
LAUREN It was wonderful! It really was. But yes, after a
 few days I had this dawning realization that we were
 just seeing and doing the same things as everyone else.
 We were just another couple of American tourists being

dragged down the sightseeing assembly line.

PHIL And we couldn't have that, could we?

RIDLEY The wine. Where does the wine come into this?

LAUREN Well, there's a little story that goes along with the wine. Phil, could you dim the lights, please?

PHIL goes to a light switch and the lights dim as LAUREN lights a large candle on the coffee table.

CLAIRE Ooh, I'm getting goosebumps!

LAUREN Just wait. Is everyone ready?

LAUREN looks around at their faces. As she tells the story she unties a ribbon on the box, opens it, and removes some dried flowers.

LAUREN One night, near the end of our tour, we were camping near some ruins and for some reason I couldn't get to sleep. So I got out of the tent to take a little walk around and I could see that our campfire was still going and that our guide, Manco, was sitting and staring into the fire. So I sit down on the other side of the fire from him and we're just looking at one another. And he takes this stick to prod at the glowing embers and slowly, he gets this small smile on his face. Then he says to me, "Do you want to see something?" He didn't wait for my answer. He got up and walked away from the fire and into the darkness.

CLAIRE So what did you do?

LAUREN I followed him.

RIDLEY For God's sake, Lauren! That's ... I'm sorry. That's very irresponsible. Claire would never even think of doing something like that.

CLAIRE So you walked into a dark South American jungle with a man you barely knew?

LAUREN That's right.

CLAIRE And when he got you alone, did he — ?

LAUREN No, no. Nothing like that.

PHIL The Virgin Queen's getting a little worked up I think.

CLAIRE I am not! I was just — get your mind out of the gutter.

PHIL You get yours out of the jungle.

CLAIRE Phil!

PHIL Claire!

RIDLEY Will you two give it a rest? So, you're following this Manco guy ...

LAUREN Right. I followed him to this small boat that was tied up on the bank of the Urubamba River. He gets in, then I get in, then we start heading upstream. There's a full moon and I can see that we're going deeper and deeper into the rain forest. And my heart, my heart is just pounding. You know the feeling you used to get on Christmas Eve when you were a child, or that precise moment right before your first lover kissed you like you'd always wanted to be kissed? It was like that. I'd forgotten that feeling, like there's a liquid fire running through you and you want it to stop and you want it to last forever at the same time.

CLAIRE Yes, yes! I know exactly what you mean! I...I'm sorry. Go on.

LAUREN *(takes a velvet bag from the box)* After maybe half an hour, Manco pulls the boat up onto the bank of the river and we both get out. He heads straight into the jungle and I'm right behind him. Four or five minutes later I can see this glow of light ahead and then we come into a clearing and there's maybe fifty people gathered around this huge fire. And when they see Manco they all start running towards him to hug and kiss him. You see, it was his tribe. And this is the ceremonial wine of the tribe.

LAUREN opens the velvet bag and pulls out a primitive looking bottle. Inside is a liquid with a fierce blue hue. She passes the bottle around.

RIDLEY It's blue! I've never seen a blue wine! They actually drink this?

LAUREN Yes.

RIDLEY Well, I can tell you right now, it's generally not a good idea to eat or drink anything that's blue.

LAUREN It may not be a good idea, but they do it anyway.

RIDLEY (*looks at the bottle appraisingly*) I wonder what it's made from? Probably some kind of berry, I would guess.

LAUREN Then you would guess wrong. The key ingredient is the skin of the blue dart tree frog.

CLAIRE It's frog wine? They make it out of frogs?

PHIL Yep. Not exactly Peru's number one export, I'm guessing. Oh, and just in case you don't know, the skin of the blue dart tree frog is extremely toxic. Poisonous. That's why they're blue. It's their way of saying, "Keep the hell away from me or I'll poison your sorry ass." So, who wants a cold Bud Light?

LAUREN I'm not finished. The tribe catches these frogs, skins them, then boils the skins in the juice of the camucamu fruit for a few hours, and this is what they get.

CLAIRE You said it was a ceremonial wine. For what ceremony?

LAUREN A wedding.

CLAIRE Oh, like to toast the new bride and groom?

LAUREN No. The only people who drink this wine are the bride and groom. They drink it the night before their wedding, and then they spend the night together.

CLAIRE Wait. They spend the night together before they get married?

LAUREN Right. There's this special pre-marriage hut and the couple enter it together. They drink this wine and then spend the rest of the night with one another. And if they still want to get married in the morning, then they get married in the morning.

RIDLEY But what's the point of all that?

LAUREN The point is the effect this wine has on people. There's something in the skin of those frogs, some drug or substance that makes the wine act as a kind of truth serum. You see? The man and woman drink it, then they spend the night together being absolutely truthful

with one another before they can get married.

CLAIRE Wow. No wonder the Incas died out.

PHIL Ah, I'm sure it's just a lot of hokey they made up for tourists with more money than sense. That Manco probably spots a sucker in every tour group and up the river they go on a "top secret frog wine mission."

CLAIRE I wonder if it really works. Maybe it's just the placebo effect. If they believe it will make them tell the truth, then it does.

RIDLEY I'm sure Claire's right. These types of concoctions and superstitions are very typical of primitive cultures.

LAUREN Right. And sophisticated cultures like ours take weight-loss pills and go to pet psychics. *(opens the bottle and pours four glasses)*

RIDLEY What are you doing?

LAUREN Well, we want to try it, don't we?

RIDLEY You're not serious. Lauren, this is hardly something that has been properly inspected and tested.

LAUREN I saw the couple drink it, Ridley. It's the same wine.

CLAIRE I'd like to try it. It's such a romantic story. I wish we'd had that wine before our wedding.

RIDLEY What do you mean?

CLAIRE And it's such a pretty color.

RIDLEY This is getting ridiculous. *(blows out the candle, plucks the glass of wine from CLAIRE's hand and turns the lights back on)* Claire, don't imagine for one moment that I am allowing you to drink this wine. You have no idea what it is or what kind of effect it will have.

CLAIRE I'd like to try it. I'd really like to try it.

RIDLEY May I remind you that I am not just your husband, I am a physician. And I am telling you that under no circumstances are you drinking that wine.

CLAIRE Well, when you put it that way —

CLAIRE grabs another glass of wine from the table and holds it up defiantly. When RIDLEY makes a move towards her, she drinks it.

CLAIRE Whoops.

The others stare at her, waiting for some kind of reaction.

PHIL What did it taste like?

CLAIRE Kind of ... blue froggy.

RIDLEY Claire ... honey? How do you feel? Any numbness in your tongue? Lips tingling?

CLAIRE No. You should try it.

RIDLEY waves his hand over the glass he is holding, sniffing the bouquet. He then swirls the liquid around and puts his nose into the glass.

PHIL Ridley, are you going to snort it or drink it?

RIDLEY I don't see you rushing to drink yours.

PHIL I'll drink it if I feel like it.

RIDLEY Only you just don't happen to feel like it, right?

LAUREN Phil's not exactly the man he used to be when it comes to trying anything different. How about a nice Mountain Dew, sweetheart?

PHIL Fine. You can't say I'm not a gracious host. *(downs his glass, then braces himself, waiting for a reaction that never comes)* That is kind of blue froggy.

CLAIRE I told you.

RIDLEY *(dips a finger into the wine and tastes it)* That's not too bad, really. Eight or nine months in some oak barrels and you might have something here.

PHIL Well then, down the hatch!

RIDLEY I really can't. I am on call, after all. A taste is enough for me.

PHIL Lauren? Adventure Girl? Miss I-Want-to-Live-on-the-Edge? Are you going to drink that or stare at it?

LAUREN picks up her glass and raises it to her lips, then stops.

CLAIRE What is it?

LAUREN Nothing.

CLAIRE You're wondering if the story is really true, aren't you?

LAUREN What if it is?

PHIL Well, then we all get to know one another a lot better!

CLAIRE Or not. I mean, we've lived next door to each other for seven years. We go to the same church, we have barbecues practically every weekend, and our kids are in and out of each other's houses all day long. How much is there we don't already know? I mean, it's no secret Phil wears boxer shorts with Looney Tunes characters on them.

PHIL What the hell? How do you know that?

CLAIRE We see you when you get your paper every morning. Daffy Duck today, right?

PHIL Jesus. I'm gonna start charging admission.

CLAIRE Come on, Lauren. This was your idea, after all.

LAUREN So it was. Well ... trick or treat. *(drains her glass)*

CLAIRE So can I please have some of that Peruvian dish now? It smells incredible!

They spoon the quinoa onto plates, and CLAIRE lets out an orgasmic moan as she samples hers.

CLAIRE Ohmygod! This is so good! This is so, so good! How long did it take you to make this?

LAUREN About three hours. Quinoa is actually indigenous to Peru and dates back to the Incas. It means "mother grain."

CLAIRE Well, this has to be one of the best things I have ever eaten in my life! It's wonderful! *(takes the big quinoa dish, settles herself on the sofa and digs in)*

PHIL Hey, this isn't too bad. Nice job, Lauren. This isn't too bad.

LAUREN Try to restrain yourself.

PHIL You know what this would go great with? Pizza puffs.

LAUREN You're killing me. You know that, don't you? I'll tell you what, the next time I make Coquille St. Jacques, I'll sprinkle some Fruit Loops on top just for you.

PHIL Sounds good to me. So Ridley, who are Trevor and Krista with tonight?

RIDLEY Oh, Mimi and Papi came over to our house. We wouldn't have anyone else babysit them.

CLAIRE You mean she wouldn't have anyone else babysit them.

RIDLEY Pardon?

CLAIRE Your mother. Whatever she says, goes.

LAUREN A little intrusive is she?

CLAIRE Oh, just a little. Try to imagine a killer whale at a baby seal festival.

PHIL You're kidding. Any time Ridley talks about his mother it's like she's a saint times infinity.

CLAIRE Ridley's mother? Please. I'll tell you what. Combine Charles Manson and a rabid pit bull and it would run for the hills at the sight of Ridley's mother.

PHIL and LAUREN laugh, but not RIDLEY.

RIDLEY Claire, that's not funny.

CLAIRE Phil and Lauren seem to think so.

RIDLEY How can you possibly say anything negative about my mother? Every time she visits she brings the kids something. A toy, some books, tonight she brought over three brand new Winnie the Pooh DVDs for Krista.

CLAIRE Winnie the Pooh. Winnie the fucking Pooh. *(They all stare at her as if she just sprouted horns.)* What?

LAUREN Nothing. It's just ... I don't think we've ever heard you swear before, Claire.

CLAIRE Have you ever watched Winnie the Pooh? I mean, really watched it? I know Ridley hasn't. He's too busy with his patients and clinics and classes and seminars and I'm the one who sits at home watching Winnie the Pooh over and over until every detail of The Goddamned Hundred Acre Wood is burned into the back of my retinas!

RIDLEY But Claire, it has to be better than, I don't know ... Power Rangers and all those violent programs kids watch.

CLAIRE You want to talk to me about Winnie the Pooh? Is that what you're saying? You want to talk to me about Winnie the fucking Pooh? I'll tell you about Winnie the fucking Pooh. Winnie the Pooh is an obsessive compulsive addict who will do anything to score his next fix. They say it's honey he's after but it might as well be crack or crystal meth. He talks about it, he sings about it, he thinks about it every minute of every day. His best friend Piglet? Neurotic and latently gay. Why else would he have a picture of Pooh on his living room wall? Eeyore? That poor son of a bitch loses body parts on a regular basis and is badly in need of some antidepressants. Owl is utterly delusional, Rabbit is a control freak, Gopher has a horrible speech impediment, Tigger is a classic case for the benefits of Ritalin and I'll tell you right now, I think Roo is just a little bit too old to be hanging out in Kanga's pouch! The Hundred Acre Wood is like some kind of cartoon mental institution. And that is the kind of movie your mother brings into our home.

RIDLEY Lauren, Phil, I'm sorry ... Claire's not well.

CLAIRE Are you apologizing for me? Is that what you're doing?

RIDLEY I think maybe we should go home.

CLAIRE Why? I feel fine. I feel better than fine. I feel wonderful! This quinoa is delicious and your mother's a controlling bitch. It's as simple as that.

CLAIRE returns her attention to the quinoa. The others look at one another, all thinking the same thing.

LAUREN It's the wine. It has to be.

RIDLEY We don't know that.

PHIL Have you ever heard Claire talk like that before?

RIDLEY Well, no. But if that's supposed to be a truth serum ... that's not the truth!

PHIL It's the truth to her.

LAUREN Is it possible? You're the doctor, Ridley.

PHIL What's that stuff they're always using in spy movies to interrogate people?

RIDLEY Sodium pentothal.

PHIL Right! Does it really work?

RIDLEY It can, but all it really does is...it's like getting drunk without losing control of your motor functions. It impairs your judgment, depresses your inhibitions and affects the brain's higher cognitive functions.

LAUREN And lying, of course, is a higher cognitive function.

RIDLEY Right. But there's no saying how it might affect anyone who drinks it.

PHIL I can tell you how it's going to affect me. *(makes a motion of zipping his mouth shut and throwing away the key)*

RIDLEY Well, based on what I've heard so far from certain people, I think Phil has the right idea.

LAUREN But we can't just stop talking to one another. And we still have the Halloween party to go to, unless we all go as mimes.

CLAIRE I don't see why we shouldn't talk about whatever we want to. We're friends, after all. And I promise to try and be proper and polite, Ridley.

LAUREN If we're going to feel compelled to tell the truth for the next few hours, we should have some fun with it.

CLAIRE Abso-fucking-lutely! So, what should we talk about?

PHIL Well, I can't stand the suspense, so let's just cut to the chase. Hands up, who's secretly gay?

RIDLEY Definitely not me. But I always thought you were a little light in your loafers, Phil.

PHIL Actually, you're not too far off the mark, buddy.

LAUREN What?

PHIL If I'm going to be completely candid, I have to say that I have always considered myself to be a lesbian trapped in the body of a man.

CLAIRE Phil! You're terrible!

PHIL Thank you very much. Now come on, we need to run through the standard list of dark and bloody secrets. So hands up, who has a tumor? Anyone? Any kind of deadly disease or condition? No? Um ... incest victim? Anybody? Incest victim going once ... nothing? Closet alcoholic? Closet heroin addict? Closet foot fetishist? Anybody with an uncontrollable urge to buy a Hummer and smoke big cigars or flash their privates in public? No? Jesus, we're a sorry bunch. It's a good thing none of us are celebrities.

LAUREN How about this? We've got half an hour before we have to leave for the party. Let's say we all get to ask one question. One question that everyone has to answer.

RIDLEY That suits me.

LAUREN Well, of course it suits you. You didn't drink the wine. You get to lie all you want.

RIDLEY What? I would never ... I am a doctor after all.

LAUREN Like that means anything.

RIDLEY Go ahead! Ask me anything you want. Claire can tell you if I'm being truthful or not.

PHIL Okay, I'll go first. I'll give you an easy one, Ridley. You get one last meal, what would it be?

RIDLEY I know exactly what it would be. Sautéed foie gras, preferably accompanied by the 2001 Sauternes from Château d'Yquem. Claire? How about you?

CLAIRE A beautifully ripened sun-warmed peach right off the tree. Lauren?

LAUREN Bacalhau. Dried and salted codfish. I know it doesn't sound that great, but it's practically the national dish of Portugal. And with some onions and potatoes in a casserole, it's just incredible. Phil?

PHIL Cotton candy. I'm sorry, that is the perfect food. Invented in 1897 in Nashville, Tennessee, by William Morrison and John C. Wharton. My heroes.

RIDLEY How on earth do you know that?

LAUREN You know Phil. The more useless the information

is, the more likely he is to know it. In fact, guess who's older than a polar bear today?

CLAIRE Oh! Did you pass up polar bears?

PHIL You bet your sweet ass I did!

CLAIRE Congratulations!

PHIL and CLAIRE slap hands and do a little bump and grind routine.

LAUREN Claire! Don't encourage him!

RIDLEY Okay okay, my turn to ask a question. Here's one to separate the elite from the herd. What is the best film you have ever seen?

CLAIRE *The English Patient*. I could watch that a hundred times and I swear I would still cry every time.

LAUREN *Lawrence of Arabia*. It's just stunning. And I love that scene where he puts out a candle with his fingers and this other guy says, "Doesn't that hurt?" And Lawrence says, "Of course it hurts." And the guy says, "Then what's the trick?" And Lawrence says, "The trick is not minding that it hurts." Remember I told you about that on our first date, Phil? And then you put out the candle in the restaurant with your fingers?

PHIL Sure, I remember. It hurt like hell.

LAUREN Really? You acted like it didn't hurt at all.

PHIL Yeah, well, that was a long time ago. Come on, Ridley. Lay it on us. Favorite film?

RIDLEY I'll go with *The Sorrow and the Pity* ...

CLAIRE fakes snoring and closes her eyes.

RIDLEY ... but I'm partial to documentaries. How about you?

PHIL Definitely, *The* ...

RIDLEY The what?

PHIL *(seems to be battling internal demons, then starts laughing)* This is ridiculous.

LAUREN What is?

PHIL I was going to lie. I wanted to lie. Well, not lie exactly, I was going to name one of my favorite films. I was going to say *The Godfather*. But that's not the best

movie I've ever seen.

CLAIRE So what is?

PHIL Okay, I know I'm putting my butt on the line here, but the hell with it. The best movie I have ever seen is ...
Babe: Pig in the City.

The others laugh.

RIDLEY All right, very funny. And nicely set up. You had us going for a second there.

PHIL I'm dead serious.

LAUREN You can't be.

PHIL I am.

CLAIRE Oh, I get it. I get what's going on. Phhhhhiiiiiiii. Phil Phil Philly Phil Phil. Come on. You can tell us the truth. We can take it. It's something a little bit nasty, isn't it?
The Secretary? 9 1/2 Weeks? Last Tango in Paris?

PHIL I told you. No joke. *Babe: Pig in the City.* Hands down, no contest.

RIDLEY Well, that's one classic I'm not familiar with. I've never seen it.

CLAIRE I've seen it. I've seen it a bunch of times ... oh my God. No ... wait. It ... well ... oh my God! No no no no no ... yes! Yes! I'm changing my vote from *The English Patient.* *Babe: Pig in the City* is better!

PHIL You're damned right it is!

PHIL and CLAIRE circle one another in excitement.

PHIL Remember after Babe saves the life of the bull terrier who's been trying to kill him, and the terrier's trying to explain himself to Babe, and he tells him —

CLAIRE & PHIL “A murderous shadow lies hard across my soul.”

CLAIRE I love that line! And then when they're handing out jellybeans to all the other animals he keeps saying —

CLAIRE & PHIL “Thank the pig. Thank the pig. Thank the pig.”

CLAIRE and PHIL hug one another.

PHIL I love that movie!

CLAIRE I know, I know.

RIDLEY They're insane. Both of them.

LAUREN Phil, it's a movie about a talking pig.

PHIL Right. It's a movie about a talking pig. But let me ask you the key question here. What does that have to do with how good it is?

LAUREN You lost me.

PHIL When you think of a great movie or a great book, what do you eliminate from the equation automatically? Can it be funny? No! Can it have poop jokes? No! Can it have talking pigs? No, of course not! It's got to be some heavy-assed thing about death and sex and power, right? Ooh, somebody died in an especially gruesome and long-winded way, I guess I'm moved.

LAUREN I ... I really hate to say this. I can't believe I'm saying this. But Phil's got a point.

RIDLEY Lauren! You're supposed to be a voice on the side of sanity here.

LAUREN Well, suppose someone like, I don't know ... Jerry Lewis wrote a beautiful symphony or an exquisite novel. It's possible, but would anyone believe it? No. Because it's Jerry Lewis. It's the same with a talking pig movie. People can't appreciate the content because of the context. That's Phil's point, and it's a good point.

PHIL Are you feeling okay, Lauren? You're not supposed to speak up for me like that. I'm your husband, remember?

LAUREN Make it a little easier and I might do it more often.

CLAIRE All right, my turn to ask a question. And I'm going to ask the big one. You first, Ridley. How do you want to die?

RIDLEY Okay. Not exactly the question I was hoping to hear.

CLAIRE It's not a threat, sweetheart. I'm just curious. I think it says a lot about a person, how they want to die.

RIDLEY In my sleep would be just fine. How about you?

CLAIRE Sacrificing myself for someone else. When I have a hard time falling asleep at night, that's what I think about. Throwing myself in front of a car to save my children, running into a burning building to save my children, swimming through shark-infested waters to save my children ... I do a lot of children saving, basically.

LAUREN That's a good question, Claire. Phil? How about it?

PHIL Oh jeez. On the golf course, I guess. Why not? Out there in the fresh air, blue sky, doing something I love. Plus, there would be a cart right there to transport my body. I've always been a sucker for convenience.

RIDLEY How about you, Lauren?

LAUREN It's kind of hard to explain.

RIDLEY Why?

LAUREN Well, the specifics of how I die, I guess I'm really not all that concerned about that. It's just not important.

CLAIRE Then what do you think is important?

LAUREN It's like this. I was driving home one night and all of a sudden, up ahead, I could see these little pinpricks of light appearing and disappearing. And a second later I'm going through this huge swarm of lightning bugs. They're going off all around me, blinking like crazy trying to find a mate. And one after another, these lightning bugs start exploding as the car hits them. And their bodies are so soft and I'm going so fast that all that was left of them was this smudge of glowing liquid on my windshield. They were dead, completely obliterated, but they'd left behind a piece of themselves that was still glowing. And that's what I want. I know my time's coming. Right now, there's a cosmic car hurtling through the darkness towards all of us. But when I'm gone, when everything I was is completely obliterated, I want to leave a glow.

CLAIRE That's beautiful, Lauren.

PHIL Yeah, she wants to be a smudge on God's

windshield. Okay, Smudge-Girl, your turn to ask a question.

LAUREN Well, my question is *the* question. How long have you and Claire been having an affair?

END OF ACT ONE