

RICHARD. You know I'm not an actor getting all the attention or a priest or something but I'm someone too, you know! I'm an important person!

BILL. Of course you are!

MADDIE. No one said you're not.

RICHARD. Yeah well, then why do we get together and always ask about Maddie's career then? And ask about Tom being a priest? But me, I'm stupid, I'm sowing wild oats or I buy stupid cars or something. I was the MVP of the state championship game, did you forget that? I had my picture taken with the governor, did you forget that? I'm sorry I didn't get to the pros, I'm sorry! Don't you think that kills me or something? But then I come here and do a poem for you. A poem from my heart. And everybody makes fun of stupid "Ricky." Like I'm funny or something. Like I'm a joke. Why? Why is that? Because we're funny, funny people, that's why!

MADDIE. *(A beat.)* You're right. I'm sorry. I don't know why I did that. These holidays just always seem so...I don't know. But that's no excuse, I'm sorry, Ricky, Rick.

(He's mollified and walks away unsteadily.)

RUTHIE. You could be nicer to him you know. *(Beat.)* I think this is your problem with men in general.

BILL. Oh boy...

THOMAS. Sweet mother of...

MADDIE. Whoa, hold on. Is this about grandchildren again?

RUTHIE. Well, I don't see any, do I?

MADDIE. So, it's up to me to give you some when I'm not even with anyone right now?

RUTHIE. Or ever...

THOMAS. Mom!

BILL. Oh boy...

RUTHIE. All I'm saying is you could stand to be a little nicer. It worked for me, it's how I got your father...right?

BILL. *(Beat.)* ...How about "picture time"?

MADDIE. How about not?

(She goes to grab her things: her coat, the suitcase at the door, etc. She places the present she carried in on the coffee table as she bustles.)

MADDIE. Here!

BILL. What are you—?

MADDIE. It's a cookbook.

RUTHIE. A cookbook?

MADDIE. Yeah, check out the section on dips!

RUTHIE. Maddie, sit down, don't make a scene!

BILL. Honey...

MADDIE. Mom, Dad, I flew over a thousand miles on the busiest night of the year to see you and every time we get together, this happens.

RUTHIE. What?

MADDIE. You! You pick and you pick and you pick. You've always picked. And now I'm doing it. Now I'm picking on Ricky. It stops now.

RUTHIE. I don't know what you're talking about.

MADDIE. I'm thirty-two years old now and you don't get to do your little digs about how I'm running my life!

(RICHARD has overheard and comes back in.)

RUTHIE. What little digs?

MADDIE. What little...!? I'm too fat, I don't dress right, I should quit acting, I should be nicer if I want to get A MAN. You know what? I don't want a man.

RUTHIE. What do you mean?

MADDIE. I DON'T WANT A MAN! Figure it out!

RUTHIE. I'm sure I don't know what you mean. And besides, I'm just taking an interest that's all...actors are so dramatic!

MADDIE. This isn't me being dramatic! This is me walking out.

RUTHIE. Dramatic. The big exit! Please.

MADDIE. *(Stops.)* Did you just hear me? "I don't want a man." I can't believe I told you that and you just...didn't hear it!

RUTHIE. Oh please, that's ridiculous. I don't know what you're talking about. You need to go to church more. That's what I did.

MADDIE. You did? What?

RUTHIE. These "feelings" you're having. That's all it is, "feelings." Everybody thinks their "feelings" are so important these days. Everybody has "feelings" Maddie, everybody. But with a little prayer, a little discipline, you can keep them in line. That's what I

did and you can do it too! Instead I see you out there, living it up, following every little impulse, you're an actress, you don't want a man, you dress like a nut. I think you're all mixed up. Society...TV...billboards...everything...it's all sex everywhere and dirtier and dirtier jokes and "do what you want" and "feel everything" and "be all that you can be"...

THOMAS. Mom, that's the army.

RUTHIE. AND! And everyone is taking their eye off the ball. Family, God, a husband. Those are what is important. Everything else is a distraction...a poison...and you have to turn your back on it. That's what I did. That's what you need to do. It's time to eat.

MADDIE. *(Pause.)* What do you mean, that's what you did?

RUTHIE. What?

MADDIE. What did you turn your back on? What was poisoning you?

RUTHIE. Honest to God, children think their parents were born old. I had a life before I was your mother. I had feelings and questions but I had the good sense to shut that door and lock it! Bernice and I used to run around like...well, but when I met your father, that was that. All that...and if I hadn't there wouldn't be a Maddie here today to complain about her feelings!

MADDIE. Bernice.

RUTHIE. Yes, Bernice. We were close. She was like you, this free, kind of...I don't know but I wasn't going to let her drag me down into all that. I resisted and I won.

MADDIE. And now you and Dad sleep in separate bedrooms...

(RUTHIE slaps her. A beat.)

MADDIE. Tom, can you drive me back to the airport?

THOMAS. Uhm...sure, I...

RICHARD. I'll drive you.

MADDIE. No, Tom will do it.

RUTHIE. Father Tom!

MADDIE. Tom! Tom will do it.

RICHARD. I can drive you.

MADDIE. I'm not getting in a car with you.

RICHARD. Why not?

MADDIE. *(Not angrily.)* You're a drunk.

RUTHIE. Oh he just drinks a little. Let's not talk about that!

(MADDIE continues to gather her things.)

RUTHIE. You act like you never got any love around here, like you're one of those "victims." Being a victim is so popular right now. Well, you're no victim!

MADDIE. I don't think I was abused. I know you took care of me, fed me, the whole deal. I just wish you weren't so ashamed.

RUTHIE. I'm not ashamed of you.

MADDIE. Who's talking about me? Tom?

BILL. Hang on a minute.

MADDIE. And maybe you do love me. But you sure the hell don't like me. Tom, I'll be by the car.

(She exits. Pause.)

THOMAS. You should go after her, Mom.

RUTHIE. You heard her, she's a grown woman, she can do what she wants.

THOMAS. I'd better get my coat.

RUTHIE. Are you coming back?

THOMAS. It may be late. I'll sit with her till she gets a flight.

RUTHIE. Well, then it's picture time, right now.

RICHARD. What?

BILL. We can't take a picture without Maddie.

RUTHIE. Maddie left and Father Tom might not make it back so, picture time.

ALL. (But with zero enthusiasm:) ...Picture time.

(They all get in pose positions. RICHARD staggers to his spot, THOMAS has his coat on. RUTHIE takes her place.)

RUTHIE. OK, smile everyone...SMILE! It's Christmas! Say, Merry Christmas!

ALL. Merry Christmas...

BILL. Hello, the future...

(There is a flash. The lights go dim and they freeze to indicate the photo as before and the lights fade.)

End of Act I