

POTATO GUMBO

By
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POTATO GUMBO

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POTATO GUMBO

for my dad and Jane.

POTATO GUMBO

Potato Gumbo was originally produced by Brazosport Center Stages in Lake Jackson, TX, featuring the following cast:

Gretchen Nelson Annette Johnson
Thomas Trahan Russell Snow
Barbara Winter Becky Gore-Laroche
Jack Trahan Glenn LaMont
Jim Cappazolli Dennis Ulrich
Gail Johnson Carol Bohley
Donna Holbrook Sharon Barnes

CAST: 4 Women, 3 Men

GRETCHEN NELSEN	Older woman, effervescent and a bit dingy.
THOMAS TRAHAN	An active, older widower not ready to just be old.
BARBARA WINTER	Gretchen's responsible adult daughter.
JACK TRAHAN	Thomas's easy-going and supportive adult son.
JIM CAPPAZOLLI	Older man with a slightly outrageous wardrobe.
GAIL JOHNSON	Older woman, the friend we all wish we had.
DONNA HOLBROOK	Administrator at Casa della Vecchia.

TIME: Early morning hours. Present.

SETTING: The Casa della Vecchia ("House of the Old" in Italian) is located in Columbus, a small town in east Central Texas, a ways outside of Houston. It's a newer, comfortable retirement community for active, independent adults. Important note: It is NOT a nursing home or a care facility.

POTATO GUMBO

POTATO GUMBO

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

The common area of the Casa della Vecchia. There is a table with comfortable chairs. One wall has floor to ceiling bookcases. French doors lead out to the patio area and pool. Double doors exit to the lobby and entrance of the facility, and another door leads to resident apartments. There is a bar with a small refrigerator and sink. Over the sink are cabinets. One glass-front cabinet is filled with various liquor bottles and is locked. We find THOMAS and GRETCHEN in the very early hours of the morning.

GRETCHEN. Ooooh that was exciting!

THOMAS. Exciting? Gretchen! That was mortifying!

GRETCHEN. Mortifying? No, exciting! I'm so glad I don't have a pacemaker! Did you see that big gun he had?

THOMAS. I'm surprised he didn't use it to shoot us both dead.

GRETCHEN. Oh phoo! Don't be ridiculous! You don't shoot old people!

THOMAS. No. Of course not. That'd be too humane.

GRETCHEN. Honestly, Thomas, that was the most fun I've had in a long time.

HOLBROOK. *(Entering in a huff and hearing that last comment.)* Well, it better be the most fun you have for a very long time to come, too, Ms. Nelson.

GRETCHEN. It was like that Christmas morning and the first day of summer kind of fun all rolled up together!

THOMAS. Please, Mrs. Holbrook, let me assure you that we won't be having any more fun any time soon.

HOLBROOK. As the administrator here, I have never had one of my residents on the wrong side of the law like this! It's outrageous! Do you hear me? Outrageous!

POTATO GUMBO

GRETCHEN. Exactly! You're exactly right! Outrageous! It was the best kind of outrageous!

HOLBROOK. Ms. Nelsen, I hope you realize that you and your partner in crime here have caused an incredible amount of trouble this evening. I don't much like it when there's trouble. Don't like it at all.

THOMAS. You're completely justified in being upset, but please don't blame Gretchen.

HOLBROOK. There's plenty of blame to spread around. Now, I hope you realize, Mr. Trahan, this is a respectable community, and we have respectable people living here.

THOMAS. Yes, of course. I have actually gotten to know several of the respectable people and will make more of an effort to spend time with them.

HOLBROOK. I'm sure you understand then that we do not expect to be dealing with the police regarding our residents at one o'clock in the morning!

GRETCHEN. It was just like an episode of Hawaii 5-O! Well, except this isn't Hawaii. Or, really, even sort of close to being Hawaii. Although, I do like the new palm trees that got planted by the pool. Maybe we could get a swim up bar put in so that we could...

HOLBROOK. Ms. Nelsen! This is hardly some fantasy TV police show! This is a very serious situation that will have serious consequences. Very serious!

GRETCHEN. Consequences?

HOLBROOK. If you two will kindly stay here, I have to go open the gate for your families and try to give them some explanation as to how this all happened. *(She exits.)*

THOMAS. What an incredible mess, Gretchen!

GRETCHEN. Messy? I don't think it's really messy, Thomas. She's just cranky. I think we should just not pay any attention to her and tomorrow, she'll have a better day. She probably just needs to get more sleep. Although, I've noticed that I don't...

THOMAS. *(Chuckling.)* To be honest with you, Gretchen, I haven't done something this outrageous or really stupid in, I don't even remember how

POTATO GUMBO

long! We got brought home by the police! Gretchen! My gosh! What were we thinking?

GRETCHEN. Thinking?

THOMAS. That we could just run off to New Orleans. Not tell anyone, just jump in the car like a couple of crazy kids.

GRETCHEN. Like teenagers, Thomas! Only seniors! We're seen-agers!

THOMAS. I thought maybe we'd get a little farther before they caught up to us. Still, it was an outrageous idea. And I can't say I've ever ridden in a police car before.

GRETCHEN. I don't think it was actually outrageous. Not like Ms. Holbrook means. It was just a poorly planned idea. Don't you think with a little practice that we can get the hang of it?

THOMAS. Yes, it was poorly planned alright, which in no way erases the outrageous part. But imagine what a time we'd have had if we'd actually made it!

GRETCHEN. We'll plan better and go again! I'm pretty free all week. Tomorrow even. I mean, I might have a doctor's appointment. Isn't there always a doctor's appointment?

THOMAS. I don't know about that. We have to fix the mess we've made this time, my dear, before we try going over the fence again.

GRETCHEN. *(Casually pulls a tissue and a pair of handcuffs out of her pocket.)* Yes, you're right. We need to fix up a better plan.

THOMAS. We've got quite a bit of explaining to do in just a few minutes, so... Gretchen? What do you have?

GRETCHEN. *(Holds up a pair of professional police handcuffs.)* They're handcuffs.

THOMAS. Holy Mother of God, Gretchen! You stole that officer's handcuffs?!

GRETCHEN. No! Don't be silly. I didn't steal anything! These were just there in the officer's car. Nobody was using them.

THOMAS. You can't just take them! That's government property!

GRETCHEN. They shouldn't be left just laying around like that or someone will steal them!

THOMAS. We have to do something with those! The last thing anyone needs is to see handcuffs right now. We can't explain that.

POTATO GUMBO

GRETCHEN. I'm sure I could explain it.

THOMAS. Let's get them out of sight. Can you try putting them in your purse for now?

GRETCHEN. *(She struggles with her purse which is already stuffed to nearly overflowing.)* I can try.

THOMAS. *(Realizing the handcuffs won't fit, he takes the cuffs and the purse from her.)* Let's just stash those for now. We'll figure out what to do with them later. Look for a place we can hide them.

GRETCHEN. *(Looking around.)* I really shouldn't pick the place. I never remember where I put things anymore.

THOMAS. I'll remember. Help me look!

GRETCHEN. I'll put something somewhere and find it somewhere completely different. You'd think someone sneaks into my apartment and moves everything around.

THOMAS. I'll come back later and get them. We have to get these cuffs back to that officer before he realizes they're gone.

GRETCHEN. Let's have him over for dinner one-night next week. What night is the potato buffet?

THOMAS. Yes! Dinner! Right. And for dessert, he could serve your arrest warrant for grand theft out of an auto.

GRETCHEN. Don't be silly. I don't think he's going to arrest me.

THOMAS. *(He puts the handcuffs between the seat cushion of the chair, puts the purse on top of it and sits on them.)* There. Now we have to deal with this more immediate mess.

GRETCHEN. Where did you put my handcuffs?

THOMAS. In the chair. When the kids come in, let me do the talking. I'm going to tell them it was all my idea.

GRETCHEN. It wasn't your idea. I took the handcuffs.

THOMAS. I'm not talking about the handcuffs!

GRETCHEN. I can have a few good ideas. I'm still perfectly capable of taking care of things on my own!

THOMAS. I'm talking about this cockamamie scheme to drive to New Orleans.

GRETCHEN. Oh yes! That was so much fun!

POTATO GUMBO

THOMAS. Jack will be reasonable, but your daughter is going to be spitting nails. So I'm taking all the blame.

GRETCHEN. We can tell them we temporarily lost our good sense. They'll believe that. They already believe that.

THOMAS. Good idea. Just remember to act remorseful. Say you're sorry a lot.

GRETCHEN. I'm not sorry.

THOMAS. Say you're sorry anyway. They like to hear that.

GRETCHEN. What about the handcuffs?

BARBARA. *(Entering with JACK. Thomas stands.)* Mom! Thank goodness you're alright! *(She hugs Gretchen, then pulls away and her tone hardens.)* Mother! What were you thinking?! Do you know how scared I was?

JACK. Hey Dad. You okay?

BARBARA. Mother?!

THOMAS. I'm fine. We're both fine.

JACK. I'm just glad nothing serious happened.

BARBARA. Mrs. Holbrook told us that the police stopped you out on Interstate 10 driving erratically. I-10?!

JACK. What were you two doing out in the car so late?

BARBARA. Where were you going?

GRETCHEN. Going? Uh, we were going...

THOMAS. *(To Barbara.)* I'm sorry about all this, Barbara. It was my idea, but it seems there was just a little misunderstanding. We thought we would take a drive.

BARBARA. I'm sorry. You thought what?

GRETCHEN. We were going to take a drive.

THOMAS. Out of the city. So that we could, um, see the stars better.

BARBARA. *(Doubtfully.)* Stars? Really?

THOMAS. Yes, there's so much light pollution that we thought if we drove outside of town, we could get a clearer view of the stars and such.

JACK. That sounds like a fine idea, Dad, but it was pretty late.

THOMAS. You know, after sunset, you can see Jupiter about 40 degrees southwest of the moon. So, uh yeah, that's what we did. Drove out of town.

POTATO GUMBO

BARBARA. (*Squaring up on Thomas.*) You both had to pack suitcases to go out of the city limits to see stars?

JACK. You packed suitcases?

GRETCHEN. Suitcases! Where are the suitcases? Did we leave them in the car?

BARBARA. Were you planning to look at Jupiter the entire month?

THOMAS. No, not exactly.

BARBARA. Obviously, your father isn't telling us the whole story here. But I'd kind of like to know where he thought he was taking off to with my mother.

JACK. Dad? Had you planned to take a trip and just not told anyone about it?

BARBARA. (*To Thomas.*) I'm sorry, but this is irresponsible. To just take my mother off somewhere. Without saying anything?

JACK. Easy there. It's not as if he kidnapped her.

BARBARA. She needs to be here. Where I know she's safe. That was part of moving here to begin with. She needs to be right here. Don't you, Mother?

GRETCHEN. No.

BARBARA. (*Wheeling on Gretchen.*) What? Mom, how did you let him talk you into this?

GRETCHEN. He didn't talk me into it. I talked him into it. This was my idea. Should we find the suitcases?

THOMAS. Now, now Gretchen. I'm taking the blame for this.

GRETCHEN. No, you're not!

JACK. I'm not sure it really matters whose idea it was. It was a bit of excitement, but you're both back safe and sound.

GRETCHEN. It matters to me. I'd like to get the credit I deserve!

HOLBROOK (*Entering.*) I've spoken with the police station. They have your car there and you can pick it up tomorrow. Although if it were me deciding, I wouldn't give it back to you.

THOMAS. Thank you for doing that.

GRETCHEN. Did they say they have our suitcases, too?

JACK. (*To Gretchen.*) I wouldn't worry. Dad's a pretty good guy. I'm sure he'll get your suitcase back for you. No problem.

POTATO GUMBO

BARBARA. Is that what you think he is? What kind of “good guy” sneaks off in the middle of the night?

JACK. I suppose, one who is old enough to decide where he wants to go and when.

THOMAS. We weren’t sneaking off, not like you’re talking about.

GRETCHEN. Yes, we were.

BARBARA. The point is that he left here with my mother without permission.

JACK. The last I checked, this isn’t a prison, and they aren’t inmates. The only barb wire I can see around this place seems to be you.

BARBARA. WHA... I can’t believe you just said that to me! Obviously, the smart-ass bad apple didn’t fall too far from the tree.

JACK. I just happen to think my adult father is still perfectly capable of making his own decisions, and I’m sure that...

HOLBROOK. Everyone! Let’s not get upset. It’s been a long night. Why don’t we all just get home to our beds and talk more about this tomorrow. We’ll talk some more.

THOMAS. That’s probably a good idea.

JACK. Dad, do you want to just call me tomorrow?

BARBARA. Do you have your purse, Mother? I’ll walk you back to your apartment.

GRETCHEN. Oh, my purse! Where did I leave my purse? Thomas, didn’t you have my purse?

HOLBROOK. Is that your purse in the chair? Let’s just collect that up and get you headed back to your apartment. *(Reaching for Gretchen’s purse in the chair, she notices the handcuffs partially sticking out from the cushion.)* Oh, this fell... What in the world...

BARBARA. Are those handcuffs?

GRETCHEN. Yes! They’re mine.

THOMAS. They’re not hers.

GRETCHEN. They are, too, mine.

BARBARA. Why the hell do you have handcuffs?

HOLBROOK. These must be the cuffs the officer is looking for.

JACK. Did they handcuff you, Dad?

THOMAS. No!

POTATO GUMBO

BARBARA. Mother! Where did you get these?

GRETCHEN. There's no reason why I can't have handcuffs.

BARBARA. There's no reason why you should.

JACK. (*Smirking*) I can think of one.

THOMAS. Jack.

BARBARA. That is so... so juvenile and inappropriate!

THOMAS. (*Realizing what's been implied.*) OH! JACK!

HOLBROOK. I'm sure there's a logical explanation. The officer said he may have just forgotten them when he was dropping you off. I don't know about that, but maybe that's what's happened.

GRETCHEN. It's not.

THOMAS. That's exactly what happened.

BARBARA. He forgot them under the cushion?

THOMAS. They must have slid down there when he was sitting in the chair.

GRETCHEN. This happens to me all the time. I put something one place and it reappears under the couch cushion.

JACK. Check the couch. Maybe he lost his revolver, too.

THOMAS. (*To Jack.*) You're not helping.

HOLBROOK. It's very late. We've all checked in. Everyone is safe. Very safe. Let's just all get home and to our beds.

GRETCHEN. Did we get our suitcases back, Thomas?

HOLBROOK. We'll straighten it all out tomorrow.

JACK. You okay for tonight, Dad? I can come back over tomorrow and check on you if you want.

THOMAS. I'm okay, maybe just worn out.

GRETCHEN. (*To Jack.*) Can you bring my suitcase when you come back?

THOMAS. We'll get them, my dear. Don't worry.

HOLBROOK. (*To Barbara and Jack as they exit.*) If you don't mind, we'll need to stop at my office for you both to sign a report for our files here. It's just procedure, not that I've ever had such a thing like this happen here before. We've never had an issue like this. Ever.

BARBARA. That's fine, I just want to be sure she gets settled in first. Let me take care of her and I'll meet you at your office.

POTATO GUMBO

HOLBROOK. Of course. I'll walk that way with you. I'm so sorry you had to come out so late. Very sorry. *(She turns back to Thomas and Gretchen sharply, giving them both a look that stops them in their tracks and indicates the handcuffs. She pastes the smile back on her face and exits out behind Barbara and Jack.)*

THOMAS. *(Concerned.)* She has our handcuffs.

GRETCHEN. I don't think that's a problem.

THOMAS. I do! We have to get those back and return them to the officer. We don't need any more trouble than what we have right now.

GRETCHEN. Of course we'll get them back. She'll give back my handcuffs because she'll want her keys.

THOMAS. What do her keys have to do with this?

GRETCHEN. *(Holding up a set of master keys.)* I have her keys.

THOMAS. How'd you get those?

GRETCHEN. I couldn't find mine in my purse. I couldn't even find my purse. She left hers right there on the table earlier. So, I picked them up.

THOMAS. Gretchen, what else have you picked up?

GRETCHEN. I pick up all kinds of things. You'd be surprised what...

BARBARA. *(Offstage.)* Mother. Let's go!

GRETCHEN. Maybe we can trade these keys for those handcuffs!

THOMAS. Maybe I could just have my head examined.

GRETCHEN. You, too? They examined mine just last week!

BARBARA. *(Offstage.)* Mother! *(Blackout)*

SCENE 2

The next day. GRETCHEN and GAIL enter carrying their art projects: bird feeders made from plastic soda bottles. Gretchen's has been more successful than Gail's which is more project than art.

GRETCHEN. I think it's a perfectly nice bird feeder. You're too critical.

GAIL. The bird world Diners' Guide will probably classify it as a "questionable dive" or, at the very least, a birdie greasy spoon.

POTATO GUMBO

GRETCHEN. But everyone flocks to those places because they're so good.

GAIL. Did you get a bag of the bird seed to fill these up with?

GRETCHEN. Oh dear, no. I forgot.

GAIL. I think they had a few stacked on the ground next to the crafting tables. We'll pick one up later.

GRETCHEN. When I put mine out, I think I'll mix some potatoes in with the bird food.

GAIL. You're going to put potatoes in the bird seed? Do you mean mashed potatoes kind of potatoes?

GRETCHEN. Yes, why not? I think birds like potatoes. And then the bird seed won't all fall on the ground. It'll be stuck in the potatoes.

GAIL. I don't have the foggiest idea if birds actually like potatoes, but it certainly can't hurt to give it a try.

GRETCHEN. Everyone likes potatoes. *(JIM enters carrying an empty soda bottle with no work done on it. He is obviously unimpressed with the craft.)*

JIM. Who comes up with these craft projects? Craft projects are nothing more than a gentle reminder that death won't be the worst thing that happens to us.

GAIL. Come on, Jim. You just needed to put a little effort into it. Not that it helped my outcome any.

GRETCHEN. I thought bird feeders were a nice idea. Especially if it means there's one less hungry bird out there.

GAIL. A bird will have to be pretty close to starved to want to eat out of my miserable excuse for a feeder.

JIM. *(Crosses to the small refrigerator and looks inside.)* I'm pretty close to starved myself. What's in the people feeder? Bah. Nothing.

GRETCHEN. Maybe you just need to add more sparkly things, Gail. Sparkly things make everything better.

GAIL. Perhaps you're right. It just needs more sparkle. Jim, is there at least a bottle of cold water in there?

GRETCHEN. *(Taking a handful of plastic jewels from one pocket and a glue stick out of the other.)* Here, I have some sparklies and glue, too. We could fix it up. Then it won't look so much like a dive.

POTATO GUMBO

GAIL. You took the glue with you? Oh my, and plenty of sparkly things.

JIM. Well, Gretchen, I don't know if you've got more stuff stuck on that bottle or stuck in your pockets. *(He rummages through cabinets and finds a package of cookies.)* AHA! Pay dirt!

GRETCHEN. Good thing I have these, looking at her feeder. *(Sitting at the table, she begins to add sparkles to Gail's feeder.)*

GAIL. I'm not sure that's helping. I think it still looks like a questionable dive. But now it looks like a sparkly questionable dive.

JIM. A few more and it'll be a birdie brothel.

GAIL. Jim! Stop that! And get out of those cookies!

JIM. They're not cookies. They're Fig Newtons.

GRETCHEN. I always wanted to go to all the questionable dives in New Orleans.

GAIL. To the dives? I'd want to go to Brennan's for brunch or oysters at Antoine's.

GRETCHEN. Those are nice, too, I suppose, but the dives are where you find the best gumbo.

JIM. You sound like you know your way around New Orleans. Have you spent some time there, Gretchen?

GRETCHEN. No, I've never been there.

GAIL. Really? You know so much about the food and restaurants, I thought you'd have been there several times at least.

GRETCHEN. No, never. We almost made it last night, though, Thomas and me. We were having a wonderful adventure.

JIM. Almost? Didn't you get stopped over in the next county?

GRETCHEN. Well, yes, but that's closer to New Orleans than right here. A whole county closer.

GAIL. Okay, yes, you're right. Closer.

JIM. You two carry on. I'm going to see if the esteemed Mr. Trahan is headed this way. We're off to run a few errands. Oh, there might be a Fig Newton left over there for you, Gail. *(Jim exits.)*

GRETCHEN. I hope we'll try to go again. You know, we were going to go to the New Orleans School of Cooking and take a class.

GAIL. Cooking school? Wow. How wonderful. I didn't realize Thomas liked cooking.

POTATO GUMBO

GRETCHEN. He likes eating which is kind of the same thing.

GAIL. That's definitely an important part of the process, too. No point in cooking if no one is eating.

GRETCHEN. I've wanted to go to the New Orleans School of Cooking for the longest time. I really think they're the best choice for helping me with my signature creation. Will you bring me a paper towel, please?

GAIL. You have a signature creation?

GRETCHEN. Oh yes! I'm working on a recipe with potatoes as the surprise ingredient in gumbo.

GAIL. Seriously? Putting potatoes into gumbo? Do you think that'd really taste good? Have you tried it?

GRETCHEN. Potatoes taste good in clam chowder. They're good if you boil them up with shrimp. Why shouldn't they be good in gumbo?

GAIL. I.. uh... you know, I can't answer that.

GRETCHEN. Thomas thinks it'll be good.

GAIL. Well then, I'm sure it will have to be.

GRETCHEN. He's never been to New Orleans either. Or to a cooking school. So, don't you think it's pretty exciting that he said he'd like to go?

GAIL. You know, Gretchen, what I think that Thomas really likes is ... you! Just my humble observation.

GRETCHEN. Well, yes, I suppose he does. We are friends, after all. I never thought he might dislike me. He likes you, too. And Jim.

GAIL. No, silly goose. I think Thomas really likes you.

GRETCHEN. Me? Oh, Gail. I don't know about that. I mean, we're friends.

GAIL. I'm your friend, but I'm not driving you to the next state for cooking school. I think our Thomas is quite sweet on you.

GRETCHEN. (*Giggling.*) Oh phoo. People our age don't... don't, I don't know... get sweet on each other.

GAIL. Why not? There's no age limit on love.

GRETCHEN. Love? Oh my gosh. Gail!

GAIL. What?

GRETCHEN. I hardly think Thomas Trahan is in love with me! Such an idea!

POTATO GUMBO

GAIL. Why wouldn't he be? He'd obviously do just about anything for you. I think if you wanted to club baby harp seals, he'd jump on board with it and drive you to the Arctic Circle.

GRETCHEN. Those little fuzzy, white seals with the big doe eyes? I'd never do that! I might club a fuzzy spider. One time I even hacked a snake into a lot of pieces with a garden hoe...

GAIL. Gretchen!

GRETCHEN. But I think the snake deserved that. Although, to be honest, I felt bad afterwards.

GAIL. I didn't mean literally.

GRETCHEN. But not baby seals. Oh Gail! You don't think Thomas would...

GAIL. Gretchen! It was just a random example. I was just saying it seems he'd do pretty much anything you asked. Just to be around you.

GRETCHEN. I don't think I'd want him harming seal babies.

GAIL. No, of course not. No one wants that.

GRETCHEN. Especially the seals.

GAIL. So, why New Orleans? Why don't you take a cooking class here?

GRETCHEN. It wouldn't be the New Orleans School of Cooking.

GAIL. No, it'd probably be the community college, but it'd be a class. It'd probably be fun. You could try your recipe there.

GRETCHEN. But it wouldn't be the same. It has to be the New Orleans School of Cooking.

GAIL. Well, no, I suppose it wouldn't be exactly the same.

GRETCHEN. This is Columbus, Texas. That... that's New Orleans, Louisiana! New Orleans is world famous for its cooking. Columbus, Texas is famous for... for...

GAIL. Right, maybe Columbus hasn't quite landed on that one thing to stand out about, but you could still...

GRETCHEN. I want to learn to make gumbo. I mean, I know how to make gumbo. Who can't make gumbo?

GAIL. I can't really.

GRETCHEN. Because you live in Texas!

GAIL. Now, I'm almost sure there are plenty of people living in Texas who can make gumbo. Even make good gumbo.

POTATO GUMBO

GRETCHEN. No, they make barbecue. I already can make a great barbecue brisket, but who cares because everybody makes that.

GAIL. I don't.

GRETCHEN. What do you mean you don't. (*Jim enters.*)

GAIL. I don't barbecue.

JIM. What are you? Some kind of Yankee or something?

GAIL. Now that's not very nice.

JIM. What self-respecting Southern woman can't lay down a mean barbecue dinner? That's just shameful.

GRETCHEN. We aren't judging, but I wouldn't tell anyone else that.

GAIL. You two! Fine. I'll keep it to myself. Where's Thomas?

JIM. He was finishing up what he was doing. We'll get him on the way back out. He wanted me to wait for Jack.

GRETCHEN. Where are you three going?

JIM. Police station, for one.

GAIL. Got a ticket for failure to control speed in the cross walk again? Unlawful acceleration?

JIM. Are you calling me fast?

GAIL. All the girls say you're fast, Jim.

JIM. And I am. Thomas, however, just needs to pick up his car from last night.

GRETCHEN. Right! It got pounded.

GAIL. Pounded?

JIM. I think she means impounded.

GRETCHEN. Right. Maybe it was that. The officer drove us home and his officer friend drove Thomas's car down to the police station. I don't remember why.

GAIL. Why didn't they just follow you here with it?

JIM. It eliminated the flight risk. You know, it gave them a cooling off period to reconsider that kind of crazy idea. Clipped their wings a little bit.

GRETCHEN. That's okay, we need to work out the plans better.

JIM. Plans like: Get a map? Or figure out how to use GPS?

JACK (*Enters.*) Hey there, ladies. Hi Jim. Are you coming along with us?

JIM. I am. Thomas said to pick him up at his apartment on our way out.

JACK. You're looking pretty today, Gretchen. That's a nice color on you.

POTATO GUMBO

GRETCHEN. Oh! Well, thank you!

JACK. You ready, buddy?

JIM. Let's head 'em up, move 'em out!

GRETCHEN. I don't think we got our suitcases back last night. Will you see if they have them with the car?

JACK. Yes, ma'am. I'll be sure to get them for you. *(Jack and Jim exit to the apartments.)*

GAIL. He is such a nice man.

GRETCHEN. I think he's a little feisty. And some of the things that come out of his mouth!

GAIL. Really? Do you think so?

GRETCHEN. He'd make a sailor blush.

GAIL. He's never been anything but utterly polite and kind when I've been around him.

GRETCHEN. He was watching some game here on the TV and his team lost. Oh, the string of swear words! It could have peeled the paint right off the walls. I think he's a handful.

GAIL. He was watching a game here? With Thomas?

GRETCHEN. I thought we'd have to slip a nitroglycerine under his tongue.

GAIL. Are you talking about Jack?

GRETCHEN. Jack? No. Jim!

GAIL. Oh! Yes! You're right about that. I meant that Thomas's son, Jack, is such a sweet gentleman. That apple didn't fall far from the tree either.

GRETCHEN. I think Barbara said the exact same thing last night. Jack is definitely a good apple, which, therefore, I think, means Thomas is a very nice tree.

GAIL. Speaking of trees, why don't we get the bird feeders hung up. Let's go get the bird seed while there's still some out there and see if we can't get someone to help us put them up.

GRETCHEN. I have some twine in my apartment we can use. Do you have your own potatoes?

HOLBROOK. *(Enters as they're exiting. She is talking on her cell phone.)* You're right, it very well could be... Hello, ladies. Nice feeders. Good job...

POTATO GUMBO

GRETCHEN. Oh, thank you!

HOLBROOK. See you both later. Oh wait! You haven't seen a set of keys lying around, have you? Keys, you know. I'm looking for my keys.

GAIL. Keys? I don't think so.

HOLBROOK. Let me know if you do. I can't seem to find mine... *(Into the phone.)* Sorry about that. Just a minute. *(She checks to be sure Gretchen and Gail are gone.)* Okay, I actually just walked right past her... No, no, she was with Gail Johnson... I think you have absolutely every reason to be concerned, Barbara. I'm concerned... In my opinion, and I've seen plenty of situations exactly like this, you've done the right thing by taking those steps... No, no I imagine it wasn't easy. And I'm sure it won't make her very happy at all, but, by God, you just have to do what you have to do! ... *(She exits. Blackout.)*

SCENE 3

Pitchers of orange juice and water are on a small portable drink cart along with a bucket of ice. A bowl of pretzels is on the counter. It's later the same day. JIM and THOMAS enter carrying the suitcases.

JIM. I'm just surprised she didn't do worse to you.

THOMAS. Believe me, it was bad enough. I walked Jack out to his car, and she caught us out there in the parking lot.

JIM. Oh no.

THOMAS. Oh yes. Without Gretchen around, or witnesses in general, she unloaded both barrels.

JIM. Bonnie and Clyde went down in a blaze of gunfire. I suppose being chewed up by Gretchen's daughter is comparable.

THOMAS. Jack seems to almost enjoy getting her fired up. But to be honest, it was worth facing the firing squad just to feel that thrill of doing something spontaneous. I bet, though, that we haven't heard the end of it.

JIM. Oh God, I hope not! This excitement has to last at least until college basketball starts.

THOMAS. It may last longer than that.

POTATO GUMBO

JIM. (*Gesturing to the drink cart.*) I see they've got the supplies out for happy hour. What time is it anyway?

THOMAS. Only 4:30. We've got another hour. What I really need is to find a way to smooth it over with Gretchen's daughter. After she dropped Gretchen off at her apartment, she was breathing fire last night.

JIM. (*Climbing on a small step stool to retrieve a bottle of vodka from behind the books on the shelf while Thomas starts putting ice in a glass.*) You know that isn't going to happen.

THOMAS. You're right. Barbzilla is on a rampage, stomping the city and all its inhabitants. No survivors.

JIM. But if you want to continue catting around with the mother, you better make nice with the daughter.

THOMAS. Catting around? Who even says that anymore? And I'd hardly call it catting around. Whatever you think that is. Do you need help with that?

JIM. Doesn't this place realize that, for old people like us, the future isn't a guarantee. At my age, I might not make it until 5:30. I need happy hour now.

GAIL. (*Enters with Gretchen. Both in exercise clothes having just come from a fitness class by the pool.*) Oh, it's that happiest of hours before Happy Hour! Pour one for me, will you, Jim?

JIM. It'd be my pleasure. How 'bout you, Gretchen?

GRETCHEN. I would, but I don't want anything with orange juice. It erodes the enamel off my teeth.

JIM. Don't you have dentures?

GRETCHEN. I do. Because I drank too much orange juice.

JIM. (*Carefully getting on the floor to look under the sofa.*) Get a soda out of the fridge, then, and I'll mix you something else.

GAIL. Whose month is it to pay off the cleaning crew so they don't move our stash?

GRETCHEN. It's mine. I wrote a check two days ago. At least I think I did.

GAIL. It'd be a lot easier if they didn't keep the liquor cabinet under lock and key. Do they think we'll go crazy and raid the joint? Swing from the chandeliers?

POTATO GUMBO

GRETCHEN. We don't have chandeliers here. I mean, I don't think I remember seeing chandeliers.

THOMAS. I would have gotten that for you, old man.

JIM. No worries. I'll do a push up while I'm down here. The exercise'll be good for me.

GRETCHEN. You could just come to the senior-size classes with us if you want a little exercise.

JIM. My doctor says that class is bad for my heart and not to go.

GRETCHEN. Bad? How could it be bad for you?

JIM. All those women shaking their business, getting all hot and sweaty. I'm having palpitations just talking about it. Doctor says I'm likely to keel over if I go in there. Better off not taking the chance.

THOMAS. *(Takes the bottle of rum that Jim has found under the couch so he can get up off the floor.)* There's worse ways to go.

GAIL. Is that coconut rum? I'll have that rather than the orange juice, too. We'll save my enamel for another day.

THOMAS. Can you get back up?

JIM. *(Rolling onto the couch.)* I'm halfway. I'll rest here a minute.

GRETCHEN. What does your doctor say about crawling around on the floor after bottles of rum?

JIM. I haven't exactly mentioned it to him. But for safety's sake, let's put the rum in a spot more conducive to my long-term good health.

GAIL. I guess, though, when you've got a group of people just trying to control their blood pressure and bladders, someone else has to control things like the liquor cabinet.

THOMAS. *(Mockingly.)* Naturally, because "this is a respectable community with respectable people living here."

JIM. Then what are we doing here?

THOMAS. My friend, I have been asking myself that very question a little too often lately.

GRETCHEN. Do they still have hippy communes? Maybe we could move to one of those!

JIM. We are the hippies. We got old. Welcome to our commune.

GRETCHEN. *(Seeing her suitcase.)* Oh! My suitcase came back! I'd almost forgotten about it. I hope nothing's missing out of it.

POTATO GUMBO

THOMAS. I'm sure it's all fine.

GRETCHEN. I should check first to see if everything is there.

THOMAS. Let me walk it back to your room for you.

GRETCHEN. What if something was taken out?

THOMAS. It's been locked in the car at the police station. It couldn't have been more safe.

GRETCHEN. I don't know. I saw how they leave their things lying around in their cars. *(She opens the suitcase and starts taking things out including clothes, an umbrella, a small skillet, two potatoes, a snow globe, shampoo, and a brush.)*

GAIL. Jim, where should I put the vodka that you can get it without becoming a danger to your dear self or others?

JIM. You had some kind of interesting packing list there, missy. What were your plans for that skillet and the potatoes?

THOMAS. Are all your things there? Let's put it all back together.

GRETCHEN. Cajun cooking, of course. Weren't we going to New Orleans?

GAIL. I suggest we find a spot for that rum now, too, before Holbrook locks it up with the rest. Where do you want the vodka?

THOMAS. Here, Jim. Can you take the rum and get it stashed while I help her with her suitcase?

JIM. I can do that, but I think we should put the rum and vodka in different places. Increase our odds for retention.

GAIL. Oh good Lord. Thomas, you know he's one ladder away from hip replacement. You go help him. I've got the suitcase.

GRETCHEN. *(Showing the snow globe to Gail.)* I got this the last time I took a wonderful trip. My husband and I went to England. Before he died, I mean.

GAIL. England? That must have been beautiful. I've never been there.

THOMAS. *(At the bookcase by a shelf of videos.)* I'll put the rum behind the John Wayne section. I'm sure the Duke won't mind that it's not Sauza tequila for the time being.

GRETCHEN. Oh, it was, the castle and the flowers. Like in my snow globe.

GAIL. It's perfect. I see why you treasure it.

POTATO GUMBO

GRETCHEN. I thought I might find another one on this trip. Although there's not usually any snow in New Orleans, so maybe they won't have snow globes there.

HOLBROOK. (*Enters. Gail tries to hide the vodka bottle among Gretchen's belongings. Thomas tries to hide the rum.*) There you are, Thomas. I saw that you've gotten your car back, but you've parked it so that it's difficult to load the passenger van. I don't suppose you'd mind moving it?

THOMAS. No. Of course not. I'll go right out.

HOLBROOK. Have any of you, by chance, seen my keys? I'm looking for them...What are you doing there?

GAIL. (*Guiltily, answering on top of each other.*) Doing where? Absolutely nothing.

THOMAS. Who me? I was just, uh?

GRETCHEN. Keys? Your keys?

JIM. (*Causing a distraction.*) Well, hello there, Mrs. Holbrook! Did you watch the game last night? Heck of an exciting ending. I wasn't sure they were going to pull it off, but then...

HOLBROOK. Mr. Cappazolli, I didn't see you over there.

JIM. Sometimes it's okay not to be seen. And sometimes, at my age, it's better to be seen than viewed.

GAIL. Please be careful on that step, Thomas. Why don't you get down?

THOMAS. I haven't seen keys. Your keys. I was up here, uh, looking for a movie that we might watch this evening.

JIM. (*Impersonating John Wayne.*) Gonna circle up the wagons and watch a picture show there, Pilgrim.

HOLBROOK. That was a terrible impersonation.

JIM. Be thankful, then, that we aren't watching a musical.

HOLBROOK. Gretchen, your daughter said she was coming by later. If you would, bring her to my office. We can all three chat a bit. In my office.

GRETCHEN. I didn't know she was coming. But I'll certainly ask her when she gets here.

HOLBROOK. Thomas, there's spaces to park the car behind the building. Unless you're planning to take it out again tonight for more star gazing.

THOMAS. Seems the forecast calls for clouds. Guess I'll just stay in.

POTATO GUMBO

HOLBROOK. See that you do. *(She exits.)*

JIM. Or she'll unleash the flying monkeys.

GAIL. That was close. I almost got caught red-handed with this!

GRETCHEN. Oh! Maybe that nice police officer from last night will come back and arrest you, too.

THOMAS. He didn't arrest us!

JIM. I say we just destroy the evidence. Get the rum back down.

THOMAS. I'll drink to that!

GRETCHEN. Thomas, instead of moving your car to the back lot, why don't we move it to New Orleans? My suitcase is still packed. I'm ready to go.

GAIL. You've hardly let the dust settle on the last wild adventure. Do you think now is a good time to make another run for the border?

THOMAS. That might be a heck of a lot more fun than unpacking suitcases, but maybe Gail's right.

JIM. Bonnie and Clyde ride again! *(He checks the fridge for a soda.)*
There's no more soda. I'll get one from the machine by the pool.

GRETCHEN. Let me get it for you, Jim. I think I took the last one. *(She exits the double doors to the pool.)*

GAIL. *(After Gretchen has left.)* Far be it for me to question the foundational strength of your ability to reason, but have you lost your ever-lovin' mind?

THOMAS. There is that possibility.

GAIL. You can't actually be considering another attempt on this New Orleans idea, are you?

THOMAS. Without a little adventure, what have we got, Gail? I still want to sow some oats, not just add them to my diet as additional fiber.

JIM. Now I'll drink to that!

GAIL. I just don't understand why Gretchen is so hell bent on this little road trip and why all the secrecy. Why not just tell your families?

THOMAS. I don't think my son would have an issue, but Gretchen's daughter has her own ideas about how Gretchen should be living her life. It's like Gretchen is her personal project.

GAIL. Maybe she has good reasons for that.

POTATO GUMBO

JIM. I think she's set on world domination and plans to accomplish it one old lady at a time.

THOMAS. At what point do our children become our parents?

GAIL. Be that as it may, do you think maybe you're getting in over your...

BARBARA. *(Enters.)* Oh! I didn't realize happy hour started so early.

THOMAS. Barbara! Hello!

JIM. Aha! The power of the conjuring!

BARBARA. I was hoping to find my mother. She wasn't in her...

GRETCHEN. *(Enters from the pool.)* Barbara! When did you get here?

BARBARA. I just walked in. How are you, Mom?

GRETCHEN. I'm fine. What are you doing here?

BARBARA. I wanted to come back and check on you after last night.

GRETCHEN. I was fine last night. Wasn't I fine? I don't think I changed any since then.

THOMAS. No, of course you haven't. It was just a silly miscommunication last night.

BARBARA. Miscommunication. I'm not sure I'd...

GAIL. Barbara! Can we offer you a cocktail?

BARBARA. Oh! Well, okay. A glass of white wine would be kind of nice right now or a spritzer, if you have it.

JIM. *(Checking his watch.)* White wine? Well, that'd take another 45 minutes.

GAIL. It's not quite yet in season.

JIM. Could we offer something more immediate? Screwdriver? Or we've got rum with a dress up from the soda machine.

BARBARA. Oh, well, I suppose whatever is fine.

GAIL. Happy Hour doesn't officially start for another little while, you see. We're just practicing.

GRETCHEN. I could open the liquor cabinet if you'd like some wine.

THOMAS. Ooooh, Gretchen, dear. I wouldn't do that.

GRETCHEN. *(Pulling the keys from her pocket.)* No, I can. I have the keys.

BARBARA. Whose keys are those? Are those yours?

GRETCHEN. *(At the liquor cabinet, trying the keys.)* No.

THOMAS. Why don't we just wait until they come officially open that?

POTATO GUMBO

JIM. Well, I'll be dipped in honey and rolled in glitter! How'd you get keys to the kingdom, my girl?

BARBARA. Mom, why do you have those keys? Where'd you get them?

GRETCHEN. I couldn't find my apartment keys, so I have these.

BARBARA. Who do they belong to? Does someone know you have those?

JIM. I know and I'm okay with it!

GAIL. They do say possession is nine tenths of the law.

THOMAS. She borrowed them actually. And we will return them. Won't we?

JIM. I don't think there's a big rush on that.

THOMAS. Why don't you let me take care of that for you right now, as a matter of fact?

GRETCHEN. It's open now! But maybe we should keep these for next time, too.

JIM. There's a bottle of white wine, Barbara, but it's not chilled.

BARBARA. Actually, I think I'm okay after all. Mom, whose keys are these?

GAIL. Jim, since you've got access to greater options and opportunities, what do you think of mixing up piña coladas?

GRETCHEN. They belong to Mrs. Holbrook, I suppose.

BARBARA. And how did you get them?

JIM. (*Going through the cabinets looking for a blender and utensils to make drinks.*) I think that's a much better use of that coconut rum. Anyone else on board?

GRETCHEN. She left them lying around. You'd be surprised at what people just leave lying around. You know the other night, I picked up...

THOMAS. Why don't I take the keys and your suitcase back where they all belong?

GRETCHEN. My suitcase? But I thought we were going to New Orleans tonight.

BARBARA. New Orleans?! What?!

GAIL. (*Checking the cabinets.*) I don't see the tiny umbrellas, but I think we can still make them.

THOMAS. Well, yes, we talked about that, but...

POTATO GUMBO

BARBARA. You're going to New Orleans? Is that where you were headed last night?

GRETCHEN. Yes.

THOMAS. No.

BARBARA. Were you?

THOMAS. Possibly.

GRETCHEN. I'm going to learn to make decent gumbo. You know gumbo is my favorite, and I want to know how to make it better. So, I'm going to New Orleans, and Thomas is taking me.

BARBARA. *(Looking at Thomas.)* Is that true?

THOMAS. It's true her gumbo really isn't very good, but the kitchens in the apartments here are so tiny, so that might be...

GRETCHEN. My gumbo isn't bad, but I can learn to add potatoes to make it better. One can't ever believe that they've reached perfection with gumbo and then just give up.

BARBARA. So, you're going to drive her to New Orleans because she gets a wild hair that she wants to make gumbo?! Are you... *(Whatever she has to say is now drown out by the sound of Jim running the blender.)*

GRETCHEN. Yes, he is. And no, he is not!

BARBARA. *(Confused.)* W-What?

GRETCHEN. Yes, he is going to take me. And no, he is not what you just said he is.

GAIL. *(Brightly.)* Piña colada anyone?

BARBARA. You are by no means going to New Orleans tonight. Not tonight. Not tomorrow night. You're not just flying off on some crazy whim like that.

JIM. *(Tasting his drink.)* I don't think they planned to fly off. They were going to drive off on a crazy whim.

BARBARA. I don't care if they were going to crawl off on their bellies like reptiles. This is ridiculous! *(Jim and Gail sit at the counter and continue to enjoy the escalating fireworks along with their beverages and a few of the pretzels in a bowl on the counter.)*

THOMAS. I have to admit, I thought it was a little crazy at first, but, quite honestly, I don't think it's a problem. I have a good car. I can still drive at night...

POTATO GUMBO

GAIL. That puts you at the top of the eligible bachelor list in almost any book around here.

BARBARA. That's great. Then you go to New Orleans. My mother isn't going anywhere.

GRETCHEN. I am, too. I already have my suitcase packed.

BARBARA. Your suitcase is just as much a disaster as this whole idea! Why is your stuff strewn all over everywhere? This is all yours, right?

GRETCHEN. (*Putting things back in the suitcase.*) Yes, it's mine. And it's perfectly fine. I'm perfectly fine!

BARBARA. (*Picking up the potatoes.*) Potatoes? You packed potatoes? In your suitcase? Mother, this is... This is not okay.

THOMAS. I see that you're not exactly excited about us going, Barbara, but we'll go, we'll cook, we'll come back.

BARBARA. Oh my God, you're serious!

GRETCHEN. Of course, we're serious.

THOMAS. She is a grown woman. Don't you think she can make her own decisions?

GRETCHEN. I don't need you to stick up for me. (*To BARBARA.*) I'm a grown woman and can make my own decisions.

BARBARA. The question here isn't whether or not you're an adult. But, I'm sorry to say, there is some concern about you making your own decisions.

JIM. (*To Gail.*) This here is the reason I made the decision not to live near my kids.

GAIL. You don't have kids, Jim.

JIM. Even better decision.

BARBARA. Let's get your things together. We'll discuss this in your apartment.

GRETCHEN. I'm getting my things together to go to New Orleans.

BARBARA. Mother, you already know why that isn't a good idea. I don't think you want to go into it any further right here or right now.

GRETCHEN. There's nothing to go into.

THOMAS. I'm fine with going and think the trip will be fun. Good medicine, in fact!

BARBARA. I'm sorry, this isn't up for negotiation. She can't go.

POTATO GUMBO

THOMAS. I just don't see a reason why not.

GRETCHEN. There's not a reason why not!

BARBARA. There are extenuating circumstances that you don't know about and aren't necessarily any of your business. She's not going.

JIM. If she's not going, would she at least like a piña colada?

BARBARA. *(At Jim.)* No! And do you mind?

JIM. I just thought it'd be a reason to stick around.

GRETCHEN. I am, too, going! Oh yes, I am! With my skillet and my snow globe! And you, Barbara Marie, are not going to have a say in this!

BARBARA. Oh no, you are not! And, by God, I do have a say! Legally, I do have a say!

THOMAS. Legally?

GRETCHEN. You won't control me! And I'm going if I say I'm going! So you don't have a say!

BARBARA. Listen to me! You very likely have Alzheimer's! You gave me guardianship! That, Mother, gives me a damn say! *(There is an uncomfortable stunned silence as all of them absorb what has just been revealed.)*

JIM. *(Putting down his drink.)* I think I won't drink to that.

GAIL. I think I won't either. My. I'm sorry, Gretchen.

GRETCHEN. *(Still very agitated.)* Well, it's not true. She's just saying that to be a toot. She's always been a bit of a toot. Even as a little girl. Quite a toot.

THOMAS. *(To Barbara.)* Are you serious about this? When did this happen? *(To Gretchen.)* How long have you known this?

GRETCHEN. There isn't anything to know!

BARBARA. We had some testing done last week.

THOMAS. Gretchen, why didn't you tell me? Don't you think I should have known about this?

GRETCHEN. There isn't anything to know!

THOMAS. It sounds like there's plenty to know.

GRETCHEN. I have a few missteps or whatever and suddenly doctors who don't know anything want to say stuff that isn't true.

BARBARA. They believe it's true. It's probably very early, but it's true. We're just waiting on test results for confirmation.

POTATO GUMBO

HOLBROOK. *(Enters carrying the handcuffs.)* Oh, Thomas. I still need your car moved. And I came across these when I was looking for my keys. They must be returned to the police station. I said you would bring...

GRETCHEN. IT IS NOT TRUE! I AM FINE!

HOLBROOK. What's going on here? What is all this?

GRETCHEN. And I will not stand here and have you say otherwise to me. I am still your mother. I still deserve a little respect! *(She bolts from the room towards her apartment.)*

JIM. Wow. I didn't see that coming.

BARBARA. *(After a pause.)* I'm terribly sorry this all came out like this.

GAIL. My dear, there's no reason for you to apologize.

HOLBROOK. What happened? This is probably something I should know about. What is this?

BARBARA. It's been difficult. For all of us. I'm sure you understand. *(She starts trying to collect Gretchen's things into her suitcase. Gail crosses to help.)*

GAIL. Please, let me take care of that. We'll take it down to her later. You go make sure she's okay.

BARBARA. Thank you. If you'll excuse me. *(She exits, following Gretchen.)*

HOLBROOK. What's happened to Gretchen? Is she alright? There's no need to be shouting at each other. We don't shout at this facility.

GAIL. No, she's not alright.

JIM. Well, I'll be dipped.

HOLBROOK. Would someone like to explain what's going on here?

THOMAS. I'm not sure I actually understand what just happened.

JIM. That's really a blow. Bless her heart.

HOLBROOK. What blow? What bless her heart? Would someone give me some answers?

GAIL. It seems she may have Alzheimer's. They had words, Gretchen and Barbara, and it came out.

HOLBROOK. Oh Lord. I was worried something like this was going to happen.

JIM. Let me help you with that, Gail.

POTATO GUMBO

GAIL. You finish this. I'm going to go see if I can do something there.
(She exits toward Gretchen's apartment.)

THOMAS. *(Laughing uncomfortably.)* Right, go do something. Go see how she is. That's fine. *(Yelling after Gail.)* I can tell you how she is: She's perfectly fine! *(To himself.)* Perfectly fine.

JIM. Well, she is fine, Thomas. Barbara said they didn't have any kind of confirmation. Maybe it's not what they think. Doctors don't always know everything.

THOMAS. Right. Gretchen isn't losing her mind any more than the rest of us. We've all misplaced our glasses or cell phone.

JIM. The TV remote, the electric bill.

THOMAS. *(To Holbrook.)* You can't find your keys. Does that mean you have Alzheimer's?

HOLBROOK. No, but Thomas...

THOMAS. *(Denial.)* No, it does not. So how is that a reason to... What's the big deal? Who hasn't had their thoughts get all tangled and... It's ridiculous. Ridiculous to even think that...

JIM. Lord knows, I'm muddle-headed most of the time. Ask anyone.

THOMAS. *(Frustrated.)* She was perfectly fine. She IS fine! We've been having a great time. We've had fun being together. *(Picking up a potato, considers throwing it, then puts it back down.)* We've been having fun, damn it!

JIM. And you two will still have fun.

HOLBROOK. Her daughter, though, has some reason for believing she has something going on and, Thomas, if the doctors are saying it could be early stages of...

JIM. That's what Barbara said, although they don't have the tests back to prove it.

THOMAS. Barbara. It was fine until Barbara stuck her nose in it. Damn her! Why couldn't she leave well enough alone?

JIM. You can't say this is all actually her fault. She's not looking for trouble, she's just looking out for her mom.

THOMAS. It's too much that we're having fun, fun that she couldn't control. She's making something out of nothing, seeing what she wants to see, because she can't handle that her mom might actually have fun in her

POTATO GUMBO

life. Have me in her life! That her mom might actually still have a life at all period!

JIM. Now, you can't really think that she'd...

THOMAS. (*Angry.*) Because, God forbid, if Barbara ever had any fun, she'd turn into a pillar of salt. So she makes up this crap. That's what this is. She worries herself into believing it and won't let it go until everyone jumps on board and believes it, too...

HOLBROOK. It would certainly be extreme, don't you think, to invent a situation like this and put Gretchen through it all just to make everyone believe something like that. Thomas, you're not being logical.

THOMAS. (*Yelling where BARBARA exited.*) Well, I'm not believing it, Barbara!! ... I'm around Gretchen all the time. I haven't seen...

(*Considering.*) I mean, it's not as if there's a single indication that...

HOLBROOK. (*Holds up the handcuffs to Thomas. He takes them, realizing that the signs have been there and he hasn't wanted to see. He turns to look where she's exited.*) I don't know, Thomas. Maybe you're wrong.

THOMAS. So what Alzheimer's? It's not as if... That only means that... (*He considers the consequences of it.*)

HOLBROOK. Yes, it may mean exactly that. (*There is a pause as the weight of the realization soaks in.*)

THOMAS. (*Yelling after Gretchen again.*) What is it you want from me, then? A party?!

JIM. No, no. Come on. It's not her fault, either. She can't help it.

THOMAS. Well, I did want a party. I didn't want this.

JIM. Of course not. Here, why don't you sit down.

HOLBROOK. Yes, sit down. Catch your breath. This isn't good for anyone. Not anyone.

THOMAS. This isn't what I signed on for.

JIM. No one jumps in line for this, my friend. But it happens.

THOMAS. This isn't my storm, Jim. This isn't my sickness! I've already done this once and I'm not going to do it again.

JIM. What do you mean? Do it again?

POTATO GUMBO

THOMAS. I've spent my whole life carrying the load, being the man, holding the hand until death parted us. I buried my heart once. Once was enough. ENOUGH!

HOLBROOK. Do you mean your wife?

THOMAS. Yes. Yes, my wife.

JIM. Oh gosh, Thomas. I'm really sorry. I didn't know what happened there.

THOMAS. It wasn't Alzheimer's with her. It was cancer.

JIM. That must have been hard, unbearably hard.

THOMAS. You have no idea. And just when I think I might survive, there might still be a heartbeat in this old chest... Now you want me to handcuff myself back to the heartache.

JIM. Nobody's asking you to do that.

THOMAS. (*Crossing to the counter and finishing one of the drinks in one gulp.*) I'm sorry this happened. Geez, I can't even tell you how sorry I am. But I'm fighting like hell to be something more than just old.

JIM. I think we're all fighting for that. You can't give up that fight either. The minute you do, it's all over.

THOMAS. It was too hard to fight my way back to life before, and now I've got other things. Things to live for. I thought maybe she was one of those things... She was, for sure, one of those things. But dealing with... caring for... How do I do that again?!

JIM. I can't answer that one for you, my friend. That's one you have to settle between you and your heart.

THOMAS. I don't think I can do it. I don't think it's in me.

JIM. We don't always know what we can do until we're tested.

THOMAS. Tested? And if I fail that test?

HOLBROOK. That happens. Sometimes that happens.

THOMAS. If I try and fail that test or if I say I just can't do it, either way I lose. Then I'm just a heartless monster. So, that's what I am, and I guess that's just what I have to live with.

HOLBROOK. It's not like that. You know it isn't like that.

THOMAS. She has to live with her, her whatever it is, disease, illness, diagnosis, whatever. She didn't want to share the information with me, so

POTATO GUMBO

she doesn't need to share the rest of it with me. And I have to live with the hand it looks like I've been dealt, too. She's got her world. I'll be in mine.

JIM. Thomas, you don't even know for sure what it is. Maybe it's not even Alzheimer's at all.

HOLBROOK. It could be something else.

THOMAS. Yeah, maybe it's not... And maybe... maybe it is. *(He exits.)*

HOLBROOK. Why did I not know about any of this?

JIM. Don't beat yourself up. None of us knew.

HOLBROOK. Oh, I knew she was having issues. I knew that. I knew about the testing. Why did I not know about this relationship between Gretchen and Thomas?

JIM. It's not as if you give a girl your letterman jacket and class ring at this age. Besides, it looks like there might not even be anything to know now.

HOLBROOK. But it's my job to be on top of the lives of my residents. On top of it.

JIM. Just goes to show how sneaky us old folks can be. Don't turn your back for even a minute. *(Blackout)*

INTERMISSION

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