

Jan Váchal

## **To Love through Marriage**

A comedy about how children sometimes give their parents a big surprise

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## **Cast:**

Theresa - daughter of Mary and Charles

Mary - mother of Theresa

Charles - father of Theresa

Andy - son of Molly and Ted

Molly - mother of Andy

Ted - father of Andy

*(The stage set is a living room, with sofa, table, chairs etc. There are two entrances to the stage. The right-hand entrance leads to the kitchen, the left-hand out of the detached house, to the garden and the first floor.)*

**Mary:** (*enters the stage from the kitchen, calling*) Charles! Charles! Where are you, for heaven's sake?

**Charles:** (*lying on the sofa in sweatpants*) I'll give you three guesses, my love.

**Mary:** Couch-surfing in your own home. I should have known.

**Charles:** Just the regionals. I don't train hard enough for the big league.

**Mary:** Not hard enough! Look what you've done to the springs!

**Charles:** Many a woman would give her right hand to know where to find her man.

**Mary:** (*waves a dismissive hand*)

**Charles:** Did you want something, May?

**Mary:** Theresa will be here any minute. She mobiled me from the station. Just imagine!

**Charles:** I see. She can turn me onto my other side.

**Mary:** You know what this means, don't you?

**Charles:** I do. A backpack filled with dirty laundry. As happens every two weeks.

**Mary:** She's your daughter too. You should be glad to have her here with us.

**Charles:** (*sitting up*) Glad? Why? She comes in and I ask how school's going. Fine, she says. What else is new? I ask. All good, she says.

**Mary:** Cynic. Theresa changes the atmosphere completely. She's like a ray of sunshine.

**Charles:** You can say that again. I should put some sunscreen on. Something with a high protection factor.

**Mary:** You have to spoil all my fun, don't you?

**Charles:** Fun? You? You can give me some, if you like.

**Mary:** (*puts her hands on her hips in an aggressive stance*)

**Charles:** Oh, very well. What is expected of me?

**Mary:** Your only, most beloved daughter is on her way here. Show her that you're glad to see her.

**Charles:** (*gets up*) I'm glad because you're glad. Theresa will be glad to see us, so all of us will be glad. And not only us. The plants will be glad. The pictures will be glad. As will the furniture and the kitchen. In the garden, everything will go into bloom for sheer delight.

**Mary:** Have I ever told you you're an oaf?

**Charles:** Isn't that what you married me for?

**Mary:** (*returns to the kitchen smiling; Charles lies down again*)

*(Moments later, from the opposite side of the stage, Theresa looks into the room. She enters cautiously, followed by Andy. Only on reaching the sofa does she notice her father.)*

**Theresa:** Oh. Hi, Dad.

**Charles:** *(gets up and looks at Andy)*

**Theresa:** Dad, this is Andy. My husband.

**Andy:** *(holding out his hand in greeting)* Pleased to meet you.

**Charles:** *(taking a step back)* Mary! Your ray of sunshine is here!

**Mary:** *(enters wearing an apron; stops in surprise)* This is a surprise, Teri. Why didn't you tell us you weren't coming alone?

**Charles:** Yes, why didn't you? Mum and I could have had the pitchforks and torches ready.

**Mary:** Ignore the old sourpuss. Introduce me to the young man, Theresa.

**Theresa:** This is Andy, Mum. My husband.

**Charles:** Ray of sunshine? This is a solar flare!

**Mary:** *(incredulous)* Who?

**Theresa:** Andy.

**Mary:** The other part.

**Andy:** Her husband. It's very nice to meet you.

**Mary:** *(to Charles)* You're in on this, aren't you? It's some kind of joke, isn't it?

**Charles:** Nothing to do with me.

**Mary:** *(incredulous)* You two are married? Is that what you're telling me?

**Theresa:** That's right. We've been married for two weeks.

**Charles:** Looks like there'll be two lots of laundry from now on, Mother.

**Mary:** *(hysterical)* Shut up, won't you! I don't get it. How can you two be married? Why are you married? People don't get married just like that. It's a solemn undertaking. It's a commitment. *(She turns to Charles.)* Say something, you!

**Charles:** What should I do? Shut up or speak up?

**Mary:** Do something. Be a man.

**Charles:** *(waving at Andy)* Come here, young man. What's your name?

**Andy:** Andy Gentle. It's Anthony, actually, but everyone calls me Andy.

**Charles:** I'm Charles. They call me the Great. I don't suppose you can guess why?

**Mary:** *(shrieks)* Charles!

**Charles:** Show me your identity card and the whatever-it's-called - certificate of marriage.

**Andy:** (*hands them to him.*)

**Charles:** (*reading aloud*) Anthony Gentle. Married. Wife Theresa Gentle, née Matthews. That's clear, then. Our little girl has gone and got herself wed. And this is our little son-in-law.

**Mary:** (*shouts*) But why?

**Andy:** That's what Teri and I would like to explain to you. Please sit down. We don't have much time.

**Mary:** Don't have much time? Why not? I don't understand this at all.

**Theresa:** The thing is, Mum, Andy's parents are on their way over.

**Mary:** I think I'm going to pass out, Charles.

**Charles:** And they know that you two are married?

**Andy:** Not yet, no.

**Charles:** I've seen this before – in an Agatha Christie detective story. And Then There Were None, I think it was called. A load of people who don't know each other come together in one house and set about murdering one another.

**Andy:** That's a good one, that is.

**Theresa:** Stop it, will you. We'd like to explain the reason to you.

**Mary:** But why? You'd only have to explain it again in a few minutes. Call me when they get here. I'm going somewhere to calm down, God help me. (*Resigned, she leaves for the kitchen.*)

**Charles:** Show Andy the garden or the house or whatever you like. I'm going to change into a human. (*Exits stage left.*)

**Andy:** I like your folks.

**Theresa:** Yes. They've always wanted the best for me.

**Andy:** (*looking himself up and down*) Perhaps I'm not the very worst.

**Theresa:** We haven't overdone things, have we?

**Andy:** You think it might have been better to tell them over the phone or by text? This way, we'll all be together, as we should be. They're adults, they'll understand.

**Theresa:** No, they won't.

**Andy:** Okay, they won't understand exactly, but they'll pretend to, because they love us.

**Theresa:** (*moves closer to Andy*) I hope we've done the right thing.

**Andy:** It's up to us whether it's right or not. Only us. As for me, with every passing minute I feel more and more strongly that I've never done anything righter.

(*A bell rings in the house.*)

**Theresa:** It's the bell at the gate.

**Andy:** That'll be my folks. You wait here and I'll bring them in. (*He leaves. Theresa paces up and down nervously. Charles enters in a change of clothes.*)

**Charles:** (*calling*) Mary! Our guests are here! Party time!

**Mary:** (*enters without her apron*) I don't know how you can joke at a time like this.

**Theresa:** You look lovely, Mum. Don't forget to smile. For my sake. Please.

(*Andy, Molly and Ted enter.*)

**Charles:** Hello and welcome. I'm Charles Matthews and this is my wife May. We're parents of Theresa, here present. (*He points at the young woman.*)

**Molly:** Hello. I'm Molly Gentle and this is my husband Edward. I hope we haven't come at a bad time. Andy asked us to come here, but he didn't tell us why. He's always been the secretive type.

**Charles:** Has he indeed?

**Ted:** Ted. Nice to meet you.

**Charles:** You might think differently in a moment.

**Ted:** I beg your pardon?

**Charles:** Please sit down. Today's programme is in the hands of our young ones. Children, the floor is yours.

(*The parents sit down. Their children remain standing.*)

**Theresa:** Andy and I have something to discuss with you, our dear parents. It's a family matter, basically.

**Molly:** Isn't she sweet?

**Charles:** Quite lovely.

**Theresa:** My husband and I wish to set everything on the right footing.

**Ted:** Who? What?

**Theresa:** Andy and I.

**Molly:** You want to get married?

**Andy:** No. We're married already.

**Ted:** (*to Charles and Mary*) Do you know anything about this?

**Mary:** We found out about ten minutes ago. Home advantage.

**Molly:** Do you understand it?

**Charles:** (*shakes his head, as does Mary*) No, but they're about to explain it to us. If such a thing is possible.

**Molly:** Speak up, then, Andy.

**Andy:** As you know, Teri and I are both university students of psychology. Which explains this idea we had.

**Mary:** The idea to marry in secret? How long have you actually known each other?

**Theresa:** It's complicated. We need you to listen without interrupting for a while.

**Charles:** There's plenty of time. There's nothing on telly anyway.

**Andy:** Here goes, then. I first noticed Theresa at a lecture, and her appearance appealed to me straight away.

**Mary:** What do you mean?

**Charles:** He means he couldn't take his eyes off her. And don't interrupt, for God's sake.

**Andy:** That's right. She attracted me. When I looked at her, I had a warm feeling, as if by something electrifying. Maybe Theresa could say something similar about me.

**Theresa:** I noticed him too. The sight of him didn't bring me out in a rash.

**Andy:** We first spoke a month ago, in a seminar. Well, we didn't actually speak to each other, we were in a group of about thirty students.

**Ted:** It gets better and better! They first heard each other's voices a month ago. How long have they actually been married?

**Mary:** Two weeks, they say.

**Charles:** So, between the seminar and the wedding, there were fourteen days. Why the hold-up?

**Andy:** Administrative formalities.

**Molly:** What?

**Andy:** At this rate, Mum, we'll still be explaining it to you tomorrow.

**Theresa:** The seminar was on the general topic of relationships and how to maintain them. The main theme was the so-called marriage of convenience in the past. About people marrying for the sake of property, without knowing and having feelings for each other. We also discussed more up-to-date themes. Andy impressed me by his defence of fixed-term marriages.

**Ted:** Is there such a thing?

**Andy:** Of course not. We were talking hypothetically. About what things would be like if there were.

**Theresa:** Andy defended with such passion that it really bugged me. What a silly idea! Married for five years, ten years, then the end. I couldn't understand how the faculty could have admitted such a headcase.

**Ted:** So why on earth did you marry him?

**Theresa:** Good question. I waited for him after the seminar and immediately laid into him. What in God's name had made him defend such an idea? He brought me back to earth by telling me that he thought it was a stupid idea too, but he was annoyed by how the rest of us set ourselves against it. Even a stupid idea has the right to an advocate, he said, even if only *ex officio*.

**Charles:** It seems that wasn't the only strange idea he had.

**Theresa:** Dad, please. After that, we sat on a bench for about an hour, talking about the seminar. We returned to its main theme. Marriages of convenience. Marriages decided by parents and entered into by their children, who didn't know their spouse or didn't like them if they did.

**Andy:** From a psychological point of view, it comprises a very interesting spectrum of feelings and moods, from blank refusal to total resignation. Somewhere between the two poles is something that may be of benefit in today's hurried times – the effort of two people to find a way to establish a solid, mutually enriching relationship.

**Molly:** Does any of this make sense to anyone?

**Ted:** I wanted him to study law. Now this!

**Theresa:** Anyway, we decided to simulate the situation of a forced marriage. We would marry and then try to find a way to each other. In this way, we would seek life-long love.

**Andy:** I really do believe that if I try to make Theresa happy and she tries to make me happy, we can have a brilliant relationship – a better one than people who have this enormous crush on each other, date for years and basically expect that it's always going to be that way.

**Mary:** But that's why people marry – because they love each other.

**Theresa:** I see love as this rare, very shy animal. If you're lucky, you come across it, but many people catch just the merest glimpse, or get no closer than hearing or reading about it. But why not try another way? Leave nothing to chance and go out and get it. Offer it your heart and wait for it to come. It may be slow and cautious, but it will come in the end. And come to stay. If you want it to. Love isn't a right.

**Charles:** Oh no?

**Theresa:** It isn't a right. If it were, we'd claim it as an entitlement from the local council.

**Molly:** Even so, this seems a bit rushed to me. If I understand well, you'd known each other a fortnight when you married...

**Andy:** Not quite. We agreed to marry straight after the seminar. But after that we made sure to avoid each other. We filled in the forms online, signed them and got a friend to act as intermediary. When we met at the wedding, it was the second time in our lives we'd met.

**Mary:** So you didn't know each other at all? Even a little bit?

**Andy:** That's the point of the whole trick.

**Molly:** Trick? So this isn't for real?

**Theresa:** Oh, it is. As we sat on that bench, we decided we'd marry first and get to know each other afterwards. As it used to be, when the lord and master would go to his son and say, Andy – I mean Anthony – you will marry Theresa of the next parish so our lands will be held in common. Her father and I have already shaken hands. The wedding is on Saturday, so don't forget to wash your neck.

**Ted:** Let me get this straight – on your wedding day, you spoke to each other for only the second time in your lives?

**Andy:** That's right.

**Molly:** And which wackos witnessed the marriage?

**Andy:** The dean and his secretary. But we had to promise we wouldn't tell anyone we'd seen them together.

**Mary:** What I think is, we need to find the guilty party immediately.

**Theresa:** Guilty party to what, Mum?

**Mary:** This lunacy. I'm not the only one who thinks so. Dad does, too. Don't you, Charles?

**Charles:** (*shrugs*)

**Mary:** Who came up with the idea?

**Molly:** Does it matter?

**Mary:** I would say it was your boy. Didn't he say he'd had his eye on her? Men are all the same.

**Ted:** And your daughter fell in with him straight away. Could it be that she made him do it? Women are good at that.

**Mary:** Our Theresa is a decent, highly civilized girl.

**Ted:** And our Andy is a born gentleman.

**Mary:** Theresa speaks three languages and is a fair pianist.

**Ted:** Andy was something of an athlete and is very well-read.

**Charles:** Is that right? We've got a book at home, too, haven't we, Mother? Two, in fact – a cheque book and a book of stamps.

**Ted:** Are you pulling my leg?

**Charles:** You started it.

**Molly:** Calm down, gentlemen. Please.

**Charles:** Look, your son is at the oldest university in the land, studying this confounded psychology. As is our daughter. So we might assume that neither your family nor ours are Neanderthals. For me, the question we should be asking is: Should we interfere in this or not?

**Mary:** Yes, we should. If they can't behave sensibly, then we must. So, which of you came up with the idea?

**Theresa:** I can't remember.

**Andy:** Nor can I.

**Mary:** (*to Theresa*) Don't think you can pull the wool over our eyes, young lady!

**Theresa:** But what does it even matter? It certainly doesn't matter to us. It was our decision and we stand behind it as one. Well, as two – husband and wife.

**Andy:** Solid as a rock. Solid as the state.

**Ted:** No, really. We'd like to know.

**Mary:** Come on, Teri, spill the beans!

**Theresa:** No. It's our secret.

**Andy:** Which we ask you to respect. We need our secrets, you know.

**Ted:** Whatever for?

**Andy:** Whatever for? Well, it's all we have so far, apart from a certificate of marriage...

**Molly:** I see. Well, it doesn't appear that we'll be finding our guilty party any time soon.

**Theresa:** There are two of us. Coupled in matrimony. And to tell the truth, we would have expected a little more support from our very own parents.

**Charles:** I bless you, children. There's nothing else I can do, is there?

**Mary:** You can't mean that seriously, Charles! Surely you're not prepared to support them in this foolishness?!

**Charles:** Am I supposed to drive them from house and home?

**Mary:** (*resigned*) Of course not. Or maybe we should. I hardly know my own mind anymore.

**Charles:** So ask Theresa. She's the one studying psychology.

**Molly:** Let's calm down a bit, shall we? I don't think it's an exaggeration to say we're all rather stressed-out. I propose bilateral negotiations.

**Ted:** So we're the United Nations now, are we?

**Molly:** If you ask me, we should each talk with our own offspring and then with the other party. Maybe then we'll get somewhere.

**Charles:** I've one suggestion that is bound to calm things down a bit. How about we drop the formalities? We're one big happy family, after all.

**Mary:** So I should crack open a barrel of beer?

**Charles:** She's just kidding. We prefer wine.

**Molly:** I'm in favour.

**Ted:** Seriously?

**Charles:** For the sake of goodwill, Edward. We're civilized folk. Bring the glasses, Teri. (*He pours the contents of the bottle into the glasses.*) Here's to happy endings! (*They clink glasses and use each other's first names.*)

**Charles:** (*after the toast*) Right then, Teri and May, we'll take over the kitchen and leave Andy and his parents in here. They must have plenty to say to each other. (*Charles, Mary and Teri leave.*)

**Ted:** I just don't understand it, Andy. There's nothing Mum and I wouldn't have done for you.

**Andy:** I haven't robbed a bank, you know, Dad.

**Ted:** No – you got married without telling us, and now we and these perfect strangers have to listen to some nonsense about lands held in common.

**Andy:** That was just an illustration.

**Ted:** Couldn't you at least have introduced us to the girl first? For politeness' sake?

**Andy:** But we didn't even introduce ourselves to each other.

**Ted:** (*to Molly*) Whose son is this you've given me? He's certainly not mine!

**Molly:** Listen, Tony... I mean, Andy. In a family, there are certain boundaries we must keep within.

**Andy:** Or go beyond. Surmount. Demolish.

**Ted:** See what we've raised, Mother! A breaker of boundaries.

**Andy:** But Dad! Don't you like Theresa? She's a pretty girl from a good family. She's funny, kind, communicative, intelligent...

**Ted:** And that's enough for you?

**Andy:** Well, I'm glad she doesn't limp, squint, smoke like a chimney and call everyone 'Dude'.

**Ted:** Just listen to the kid! Cheeky brat!

**Molly:** Calm down, Edward. Look here, Andy, it's no wonder we're worried about you. You have to admit that what you've done isn't exactly normal.

**Andy:** I knew you'd understand me, Mum.

**Molly:** I didn't say that.

**Andy:** Teri and I married to find out if it was possible to build a beautiful man-woman relationship out of nothing. The certificate of marriage gives us a responsibility to each other. Now it's up to us to try to build that relationship. And to tell the truth, I like making her happy.

**Molly:** Which is a normal state of affairs. Two people get together and make each other happy.

**Andy:** Yes, it is. We wanted to do it in a different way.

**Ted:** And you did. Are you happy?

**Andy:** Yes, I am. I'm like the cat with the cream. I've got my own bowl and a certificate from City Hall to prove it. Now it's up to me to put cream in the bowl every day.

**Ted:** So the young man married a cat's bowl. Maybe he was worried another tom would get to her first. Which is why he made fools of his parents.

**Andy:** That's not fair.

**Molly:** Maybe fools is too strong a word.

**Ted:** Idiots, then!

**Molly:** Let's stick with fools.

**Andy:** I love you both, you know.

**Ted:** Then divorce her!

**Andy:** I couldn't even if I wanted to. I promised to stay with her for richer, for poorer.

**Molly:** So that's his game! Applied psychology in practice. He puts us in a state of stress and then he puts us under observation.

**Ted:** Don't try those IQ tests on me! I'm so upset, I'd come out with a minus figure.

**Molly:** Are you testing us, Andy?

**Andy:** No, I'm not. I'm testing myself, and I don't want to disappoint Theresa. I've decided to search for love as people used to search for gold.

**Ted:** So you'll be needing a pick, then?

**Andy:** A gold-digger went off into the wilderness, staked out the ground and started looking. Either he found something or he didn't. But he who didn't look, didn't find.

**Molly:** And what if you don't find?

**Andy:** I will. I believe that more and more every day.

**Molly:** It's so romantic!

**Ted:** Be quiet, for God's sake.

**Andy:** *(calls)* Theresa! Can you please return from your exile?

*(Theresa, Mary and Charles enter the stage.)*

**Theresa:** Did you call me?

**Andy:** I was thinking we should all get to know each other.

**Ted:** I see: I should get to know my own son.

**Andy:** That's an interesting reaction.

**Ted:** I don't need psychoanalysing.

**Molly:** Gentlemen, please.

**Charles:** I don't think mass therapy is going to work here, Teri. This isn't Alcoholics' Anonymous.

**Andy:** But some kind of session would be good.

**Charles:** Oh, man! Psychology for Beginners.

**Mary:** Is it necessary?

**Charles:** It seems it is, if we wish to survive this.

**Theresa:** Have you got a better idea?

**Charles:** To let it fester.

**Ted:** I've got a more radical suggestion.

**Charles:** Oh yes? Shall we blow a raspberry at it?

**Ted:** (*waves a dismissive hand*) May I have a word in your ear, Theresa? (*Theresa and Ted are on the left. The others are at the back of the stage on the right, talking together quietly in a huddle.*)

**Ted:** You look like a reasonable girl.

**Theresa:** I *look* like one?

**Ted:** Let's just say that I understand that marriage may seem to you an interesting psychological experiment. But I think there's been quite enough of it.

**Theresa:** We're just getting started.

**Ted:** Andy is still a child. As you know, men achieve maturity much later than women.

**Theresa:** You should watch what you say about my husband.

**Ted:** You're a student of psychology, but you're a long way from being a psychologist. From psychology graduate to good psychologist is quite a stretch. So less of those X-ray eyes of yours. You won't get into *my* head.

**Theresa:** Are we still dispensing with formalities?

**Ted:** Of course.

**Theresa:** I can see right through you, Ted. You don't mind my being married to Andy. What you mind is that it wasn't your decision. You expect Andy's eternal gratitude for giving him life and bringing him up. Do you really think that gratitude is greater than his own dreams, desires, needs? Greater than love?

**Ted:** You've got a sharp tongue on you, I see.

**Theresa:** I'm defending my husband.

**Ted:** No, you're not. You're excusing your own inexcusable behaviour.

**Theresa:** What a riot you are! I can see you'll give me plenty of material. A conservative mastodon lost in the modern age.

**Ted:** I am what I am. You won't change me.

**Theresa:** Nor would I wish to. That's Molly's concern. My future is Andy.

**Ted:** Andy is my past, present and future.

**Theresa:** In that case, then, he's *our* future.

**Ted:** On that point, I beg to differ.

**Theresa:** Should I understand that as a declaration of war.

**Ted:** I wouldn't put it quite like that.

**Theresa:** If it's your intention to get Andy to choose between me and you, then war it is. And then there will only be losers.

**Ted:** It wasn't me who started it.

**Theresa:** I'd say it hasn't started yet. There's still time for a peace-pipe. (*Theresa turns and walks over to the others. They scatter about the stage.*)

**Mary:** They've no idea what marriage entails.

**Charles:** In theory, they know more than we do. They're studying it. We learned by trial and error.

**Ted:** Error and error, that's what I'd call what they're doing.

**Charles:** Teri has a good recipe for a happy marriage. What were those psychologist's abbreviations you learned at school? And what was the chap's name again?

**Theresa:** Stanley Short. Yes, how did it go? (*She thinks.*) A husband expects from his wife the following: Nervad Nowo Sendam Cooky. And from her husband, a wife expects Sitchat Soulmo Feelneed Tellso.

**Ted:** What on earth are you on about now?

**Theresa:** The husband expects Nervad, that's neverending admiration. Even when there's nothing much to admire. This is probably related to the fact that every man is thirty per cent vanity and seventy per cent water. Nowo means not to be burdened with worries, of the everyday kind. Men like to fret about politics and football, but the rest is below their discernment. Sendam is sex on demand.

**Molly:** Sex on demand?

**Mary:** Within the marriage, of course.

**Theresa:** And Cooky means the cooking and cleaning is done. Nervad Nowo Sendam Cooky.

**Charles:** And the women?

**Theresa:** Wives expect Sitchat Soulmo Feelneed Tellso. Sitchat means sitting and talking together. In better cases, the husband even pays attention to what the wife is saying. Soulmo is spiritual understanding. We're romantic souls with a liking for knights in shining armour. Feelneed means to sense what she needs, which is often a problem, as many men lack the ability to do this. But making an effort is appreciated. Tellso means telling her he loves her their whole lives long. This means never forgetting a birthday or anniversary and occasionally buying her flowers and chocolates, plus the odd Mercedes.

**Charles:** (*nodding appreciatively*) Got it all worked out, haven't you?

**Ted:** A load of Washhog, in my view. (*Looks to see if the others know what he means.*) Hogwash.

**Molly:** There are more important things in life. Like where they're going to live after they graduate.

**Charles:** At ours, if you like. I'm tired of climbing stairs - I'd like a whole floor to myself. And the garden next to the house is big enough for threescore grandchildren.

**Theresa:** (*tugs at Charles's sleeve*) Threescore means sixty, Dad.

**Charles:** Isn't that a gross?

**Theresa:** A gross is one hundred and forty-four.

**Charles:** (*waves a dismissive hand*) Anyway, the garden is big enough for the whole crop of grandchildren.

**Ted:** (*horrified*) Hang on! They've only just got married!

**Mary:** Of course. There'll be plenty of time for grandkids when they finish school.

**Charles:** Besides, if I remember correctly, it takes time to make a child. Nine months, isn't it? Unless Brussels has changed it.

**Molly:** I'm looking forward to having grandkids. (*She looks at Ted, who is frowning.*) Just a little.

**Ted:** What are we talking about here? They hardly know each other! (*He turns to Theresa.*) From what I understand, you haven't even been on a date yet.

**Theresa:** Doesn't City Hall count?

**Molly:** But what about the wedding reception? Where did you go for that?

**Theresa:** We had two hot dogs each and we shared an ice-cream sundae.

**Mary:** How awful! Ice cream and hot dogs? How could you?!

**Andy:** Most of our money went on the wedding bouquet.

**Charles:** We must put this right. The wedding might be over, but we can still have a reception. There's no time limit on that.

**Theresa:** No weight limit, either.

**Ted:** What are you on about? First children, now the wedding reception. It's time we were leaving, Molly.

**Andy:** Where will you go?

**Ted:** To a hotel. I've had as much of this as I can take today.

**Mary:** Feel free to spend the night here. We've got a guest room.

**Ted:** Thanks, but no thanks. Mother and I need to talk this through properly. Alone.

**Charles:** (*to Mary*) Ted's afraid there's a microphone in the room. There's no time for us to bug a hotel room, obviously.

**Ted:** Will you see us out, Andy?

**Andy:** Of course.

**Charles:** So bye for now, and sweet dreams! (*Mary just waves.*)

(*Ted turns back but doesn't speak. Andy follows him out.*)

**Molly:** See you tomorrow, then. Maybe things will seem better in the morning. (*She leaves.*)

**Theresa:** (*runs to the door and calls out*) Come back soon, Andy. Don't forget we've got those lecture notes to finish reading!

**Charles:** I'll bet you have.

**Theresa:** I'd better wait for him at the gate. (*She goes out.*)

**Charles:** Yes, you'd better. Mary and I have things to do too. We've got to get our strength up for tomorrow's joust. (*Charles and Mary leave for the kitchen.*)

*(The light slowly fades, to show that night is falling. Music plays.)*

*(Darkness gradually gives way to light, to show daybreak. A cock crows.)*

*(Mary enters stage left. The cock crows again.)*

**Charles:** *(his voice coming from a distance)* Shut your face!

*(Mary points upstairs, as if about to say something. Then she waves a dismissive hand, because Theresa is entering the room carrying a tray.)*

**Theresa:** Good morning.

**Mary:** Morning, Teri. What's that?

**Theresa:** Breakfast.

**Mary:** I was asking about what you're wearing.

**Theresa:** *(puts down the tray)* A nightie. Pretty, isn't it?

**Mary:** It's very short. And obviously quite airy.

**Theresa:** This is what we wear nowadays. Do you think I've got the legs for it?

**Mary:** Your legs are fine. It's just that they're so visible.

**Theresa:** Oh, come on, Mum! It's lovely. *(She twirls.)*

**Mary:** Well, I know it's the twenty-first century, but still...

**Theresa:** It's from Paris.

**Mary:** Really?

**Theresa:** Really. At least, that's what the Asian chap on the stall told me.

**Mary:** I should slap your peeping-out behind.

**Theresa:** *(Replies with a sweet smile.)*

**Mary:** You really would deserve a slap. You've pulled quite a stunt, young lady.

**Theresa:** I hope not. I was worried about being left on the shelf.

**Mary:** What are you on about? A lovely girl like you? The boys must be like wasps to a flame around you.

**Theresa:** The problem's with me, not the boys. I've got a head full of psychology. I study, categorize and deconstruct everyone I meet. Would you believe that every time I use public transport after a lecture, by the time I get out, all my fellow passengers have a full personality profile? And all I've done is look at them.

**Mary:** Not a diagnosis, then?

**Theresa:** Everything but. I take it all far too seriously. Every boy who speaks to me or even just walks past me, I scan and analyse, searching for flaws. Out of a hundred possible phobias, he has at least ninety-nine. Within moments, I've evaluated and labelled him as genetically unsuitable or as some kind of pervert. There's nothing in between.

**Mary:** And Andy?

**Theresa:** He's the same kind of looney as I am. He wanted to get to know me, but he was worried about what he'd find out.

**Mary:** So that's why you married without getting to know each other first?

**Theresa:** Of course. And it was an idea in a million, I can tell you. Such a weight off my shoulders! No need to consider whether he was suitable for me. He's mine, and all I have to do is enjoy the relationship.

**Mary:** So you haven't found any perversions in him yet?

**Theresa:** Oh yes. A whole range of classics and several so far not described in the literature. But I'm ready to fight them. I'm happy.

**Mary:** I couldn't wish for anything more.

**Theresa:** I love you, Mum. I really do.

**Mary:** So you'll invite me to the divorce?

**Theresa:** I feel this will be the classic 'till death do us part'. (*She picks up the breakfast tray.*)

**Mary:** Where are you going with that food?

**Theresa:** I'm giving Andy breakfast in bed. I need to pamper him.

**Mary:** As long as he doesn't get too used to it.

**Theresa:** (*looks over to the sofa*) Is that sofa sagging again, or am I just imagining it?

**Mary:** Don't be cheeky.

**Theresa:** I was just making conversation. I've got to go – my lion is sure to be hungry.

**Mary:** Mine is nothing but hungry these days.

**Theresa:** (*Exiting stage left, smiling. Passes Charles on her way out.*) Morning, Dad.

**Charles:** (*turns to get a good look at her*) Yes, it is a lovely morning, isn't it, Teri?

**Mary:** Your eyes are out on sticks.

**Charles:** That girl is a credit to us. A joy to behold.

**Mary:** As her father, shouldn't you be jealous?

**Charles:** I am. She was delivering his breakfast, I saw.

**Mary:** I thought that would impress you.

**Charles:** It's a nice thing to do. You might think of adopting it as a new family tradition.

**Mary:** Breakfast in bed? I don't see why not. At least you'd do something in it.

**Charles:** Agreed, then?

**Mary:** Forget it. You make too many crumbs.

**Charles:** Because I eat with appetite.

**Mary:** Anyway, we should make sure we're singing from the same hymnsheet. The Gentles will be here soon. Funny name, isn't it?

**Charles:** Gentle? I suppose it is.

**Mary:** So what position will we take?

**Charles:** Position? What's the point of our having a position? They have a certificate from City Hall. Plus, they spent last night under our roof in the same room, and I don't imagine they got much sleep. This morning she served him breakfast on a silver platter. I don't think there's anything left to discuss.

**Mary:** How reckless of them! Do they think they can keep this up their whole lives long?

**Charles:** It's up to them to find their way together. They'll get by without us.

**Mary:** But how?

**Charles:** Somehow or other. Maybe that coffee she took him was poisoned.

**Mary:** You have to make a joke out of everything, don't you?

**Charles:** Look at it this way, May. If she'd brought Andy to us first, maybe we'd have tried to talk her out of marrying him. And as an obedient daughter, maybe she would have obeyed us. And as a result, she may have missed out on the love of her life.

**Mary:** You're making excuses for her marrying on impulse.

**Charles:** Our advice is as old as we are. It's no good to them.

**Mary:** What a thing to say!

**Charles:** Life has taught me that women have built-in radar for such things. A sixth sense.

**Mary:** What rubbish!

**Charles:** How else do you explain your marrying me? Remember how we got to know each other?

**Mary:** You spilled cola on me. It went down my neck. I attracted every wasp in the neighbourhood.

**Charles:** Right. Foolishly, I was hoping that you'd rip off your dress, but instead, you jumped into the pond and scared all my fish away.

**Mary:** I couldn't have cared less about your fish.

**Charles:** Do you remember what you said after you crawled out, all bedraggled? Through gritted teeth, it was. Who'll marry me now? you said. And I said I would.

**Mary:** Good God! It's genetic!

**Charles:** No, it's not. We'd been dating for over a year.

**Mary:** Things go faster these days.

**Charles:** We must try to understand, May. What I think is, the one thing Theresa needs from us now is support.

**Mary:** I just don't know...

**Charles:** What don't you like about it?

**Mary:** Am I supposed to be glad that she's with someone she doesn't know from Adam?

**Charles:** Maybe it's love at first sight.

**Mary:** More like love at only sight.

**Charles:** Let me tell you something, May. You know Vince from work? Well, last week he was telling me about a gentleman caller with an interest in his Judith. Long greasy hair, great chain around his neck, tattoos all the way up both arms, torn jeans. Traipsed across their Persian carpet in his muddy combat boots. The first thing he said to Vince was: Got a ciggy, chief?

**Mary:** So what did Vince do?

**Charles:** Kicked him out there and then. Judith was inconsolable. Said that goon was the love of her life. For me, over-educated Andy is a far happier prospect.

**Mary:** I know. It's just that it was all so sudden...

**Charles:** I propose a strategy of passive resistance. I won't speak out one way or the other, until my words can serve some purpose. We should act only in the event of a crisis, and even then only on request.

**Mary:** But I'd...

**Charles:** You don't want Theresa to turn against us, do you?

**Mary:** She'd never do that.

**Charles:** She might if you gave her a straight choice - us or Andy.

**Mary:** Perhaps you're right. If Theresa wants him, then we want him. We have a daughter *and* a son now. But I'd like you to tell Molly and Ted that.

**Charles:** Of course. Welcome to the family, chief, I'll say.

*(The bell rings.)*

**Mary:** Well, here's your chance. Ted will probably hit the roof.

**Charles:** Yes, it seems that our arch-relations have arrived. Notice how high I hold my head as I let them in, May. *(He departs.)*

**Mary:** What else can you do?

*(Molly and Ted enter.)*

**Mary:** Good morning.

**Ted:** I'm hoping it will be.

**Molly:** Hello. Where are the young ones?

**Mary:** Still upstairs. Your Andy was given breakfast in bed. I'll go and fetch them. *(She goes out.)*

**Ted:** Good Lord, he's got her where he wants her.

**Charles:** Well, as the girls are queuing up for your son, she has to make an effort. Just now as I was coming down the stairs I passed a number of princesses, a couple of pop singers, a dozen or so stars of the silver screen and more top models than I could count.

**Ted:** Our Andy is no one to be sniffed at, you know. It's just that he's a bit of an intellectual.

**Charles:** Which probably explains why our intellectual chose him.

**Ted:** She's fawning over him.

**Charles:** Anyway, why shouldn't he have her where he wants her? They're married, for God's sake.

**Molly:** I think it's nice. I could get used to breakfast in bed.

**Ted:** Andy takes it for granted.

**Molly:** *(She hisses but says nothing.)*

*(Enter Theresa, now in her normal day clothes, Andy and Mary.)*

**Andy:** Hey, Mum. Hi, Dad.

**Theresa:** Hello.

**Ted:** Good morning. *(Molly just waves.)*

**Charles:** *(quietly to Mary)* Houston, we have a problem. Ted's face is wearing a grave expression.

**Ted:** *(clears his throat)* So, your mother and I have had a long talk about what has arisen.

**Molly:** *(Stands stock-still.)*

**Ted:** And we've reached this conclusion, haven't we, Mother?

**Molly:** *(Lowers her eyes.)*

**Ted:** Andy and Theresa should divorce.

*(Theresa, Andy, Charles and Mary look at each other before forming a huddle and consulting one another. Then they separate.)*

**Theresa:** After a short consultation, we've reached this conclusion: We don't understand why we should.

**Ted:** Isn't it obvious?

**Charles:** Not to me it isn't.

**Ted:** They married without knowing each other.

**Charles:** So they should divorce before they get acquainted? What are you worried about? That once they know each other, they won't want a divorce?

**Ted:** In my view, people should take important steps in life with great care and after long deliberation.

**Mary:** But what's the hurry? Divorce, too, is an important step in life.

**Ted:** You're not taking me seriously!

**Charles:** Why don't they divorce and then register their partnership?

**Mary:** Only same-sex couples can do that.

**Charles:** But that's discrimination! I protest!

**Ted:** Enough! They're getting a divorce and let that be an end to it!

*(Theresa and Andy must turn away to hide their laughter.)*

**Ted:** Andy! Do you find your father ridiculous?

*(Theresa and Andy remain with their backs to the audience, their shoulders shaking.)*

**Ted:** Your mother and I insist you divorce. Don't we? *(He turns to Molly.)*

**Molly:** Yes, Father. *(As soon as Ted turns away, she gestures that this is not the case.)*

**Ted:** I urge you, Charles, to have strong words with your daughter.

**Charles:** I did try that once or twice, but I gave it up as a bad job when she was three years old. Besides, I don't see any reason for them to divorce.

**Ted:** We are their parents. They must obey us.

*(Andy and Theresa turn and walk right, to the edge of the stage, from where they watch the action.)*

**Charles:** It's enough for me that she comes home occasionally, studies hard and doesn't do drugs.

**Ted:** I insist on this divorce. When all's said and done, it's about the happiness of my son.

**Mary:** Well I'm fully behind my daughter.

**Charles:** And my son-in-law has my firm backing.

**Ted:** What on earth...!

**Charles:** You say tomato, we say tomahto...

**Ted:** If Andy doesn't divorce, I shall disinherit him.

**Andy:** You mean you'll stop giving me my pocket money?

**Ted:** Not a penny more! *(He turns to Charles and makes a vigorous hand gesture to show that this is so.)*

**Charles:** *(laughs)* Do you know this one? *(He sings.)* He knows a girl, she's got the money, and a cottage she will get as dowry.

**Mary:** And a new cupboard too.

**Charles:** That's right. *(Sings.)* And a new cupboard too.

**Ted:** What a madhouse this is!

**Mary:** So what do you think, Molly?

**Molly:** Don't drag me into it. I'm just here to agree. It doesn't matter who with.

*(Andy and Theresa watch their parents' shoulder-shrugging confusion with amusement.)*

**Theresa:** *(whispers to Andy)* Exercise twenty-eight?

**Andy:** The one on quarrel management?

*(Theresa nods and Andy walks to the other side of the stage.)*

**Andy:** It's true that Teri and I don't know each other well yet, but that was the plan. What scares me is the model she's been given.

**Theresa:** What do you mean?

**Andy:** Your parents. Especially your father. He makes light of everything.

**Theresa:** He is a bit of a wise guy. *(She turns to Charles, who has installed himself on the sofa and is waiting to see what develops.)*

**Andy:** I'd call him a light-minded windbag.

**Charles:** I must put that on my business card.

**Andy:** See what I mean? What if you take after him? What if you treat our relationship as a joke?

**Theresa:** My father sometimes behaves like a child. At others, he's like a stand-up comic. But what about yours? He masks his indecisiveness with an attitude of hardness, without regard for the consequences. He wants everything to revolve around him, yet he has zero gravitational pull.

**Ted:** Are you calling me a nonentity?

**Andy:** Dad, please. Leave this to me.

**Theresa:** What if you're just like him? I don't intend to spend my life satisfying your whims.

**Andy:** My father isn't whimsical. He has principles.

**Theresa:** An alpha male, in other words.

**Andy:** Which is better than being a beta male.

**Theresa:** I want a husband I can lean on in a crisis. In everyday situations, I want an equal partner. All I see so far is this insecure guy who can't see beyond the sandbox.

**Andy:** I am a real man. You're a spoiled little girl.

**Ted:** *(whispers to Molly)* This is going well.

**Andy:** I'm not even sure I want to get to know you.

**Theresa:** And I don't like what I see. *(She points at Ted.)* In a few years, you'll look like that.

**Mary:** Let me...

*(Andy and Theresa look at her.)*

**Mary:** Nothing.

**Theresa:** I know it's a cliché, but what did I think my eyes were telling me?

**Andy:** And where was my goddamn common sense?

**Theresa:** Common sense? Well, you didn't inherit any, and you can't get it from the chemist's.

**Andy:** Little Miss Wise Guy.

**Theresa:** I wish I could never see you again.

**Andy:** Take my advice. Close your eyes.

**Mary:** That's enough! Charles, say something!

**Charles:** *(watching from the sofa with a smile on his face)* Exercise twenty-eight. Quarrel management.

*(Everyone looks at him.)*

**Theresa:** How did you know that?

**Charles:** Because you're a slob. You're always leaving study materials lying around. Sometimes I dip into them.

**Ted:** Hang on – so that wasn't a real argument?

*(Theresa and Andy shake their heads.)*

**Ted:** So what do I look like now, Andy?

**Andy:** Still the same.

**Ted:** And Mother and I were so happy to think that you were on the right track...

*(Behind his back, Molly indicates that she wasn't.)*

**Ted:** It was so beautiful. So hopeful. Divorce was within touching distance.

**Andy:** There won't be any divorce, I'm afraid.

*(Theresa threads her arm through his and nods. Mary and Molly high-five each other.)*

**Ted:** They were just testing us. Using us as guinea pigs.

**Charles:** Better a guinea pig than a lab rat.

**Ted:** *(Waves a hand in resignation.)*

**Theresa:** Isn't it great that our group is perfectly composed? Ted is a typical choleric personality. He flares up quickly and not even a strong verbal dousing can put out the fire. Molly is a melancholic personality. She takes it for granted that her opinion doesn't count. Dad is a typical phlegmatic individual.

**Charles:** I don't care what I am.

**Theresa:** A sarcastic phlegmatic individual. And Mum is a sanguine type. She takes pleasure in whatever comes her way. As far as she's concerned, nothing is ever so good that it can't get even better. We could transpose the four of you into the psychology textbooks.

**Charles:** And we could add you to the list of smartass kids.

**Theresa:** I've got an excuse. I'm your genetic fingerprint.

**Ted:** Before I explode for good and all, as predicted, there's one thing I'd like to know. Divorce or no divorce?

**Everyone else but Molly:** No divorce!

**Molly:** Probably not.

**Ted:** My last offer. I'll pay the costs of a divorce.

**Charles:** *(looking around)* You must have been saving up.

**Ted:** Shall we vote? Who is for divorce?

**Andy:** Divorce in general or the divorce of the two of us?

**Ted:** Your divorce, of course. Who's for? *(He raises his hand.)*

*(Molly does nothing.)*

**Ted:** Mother!

**Molly:** I'm abstaining.

**Theresa:** Who's against?

*(Theresa, Andy, Mary and Charles raise a hand.)*

**Molly:** Who's abstaining? *(She raises a hand.)*

**Ted:** So I'm the only one here with his head screwed on right?

**Theresa:** *(with her arms around Andy's neck)* Well, ours aren't. We're madly in love.

**Ted:** We're leaving, Mother.

**Charles:** *(getting up from the sofa)* Enough! I will now exercise my right as master of this house. Young ones outside, to the garden. Ladies to the kitchen. I wish to speak with Ted.

**Andy:** Just the two of you?

**Charles:** Just the two of us. Face to face. Choleric personality to phlegmatic personality. On the level.

**Theresa:** That sounds interesting. From a purely academic standpoint.

**Charles:** Out! And that's an order.

*(Andy and Theresa come to attention and salute.)*

**Andy:** Yes, sir! Quick march! Left, left and left again!

*(Andy and Theresa march off the stage.)*

**Charles:** *(turning to Mary and Molly)* Shoo!

*(Molly leaves immediately; Mary shakes her fist in jest.)*

**Charles:** What *is* your problem, Ted?

**Ted:** No one listens to me.

**Charles:** Do you know why that is? Because you've been talking about yourself, and this is about them.

**Ted:** Never has Andy defied me so blatantly.

**Charles:** He's grown up.

**Ted:** He's my son.

**Charles:** And she's my daughter. I should be going out of my mind. If she'd brought Andy here and introduced him as a classmate, friend or even her boyfriend and then asked to spend the night in one room with him, as her father I would have hit the roof.

**Ted:** So how would you have acted?

**Charles:** I'd have split them up. Put them in separate rooms. But as a married couple, it's normal for them to be together.

**Ted:** What are you trying to say?

**Charles:** That from one point of view, their behaviour is correct. First the wedding, then the sex. You should appreciate that.

**Ted:** I should appreciate the fact that they presented us with a *fait accompli*? Making fools of us into the bargain?

**Charles:** That's not what I'm saying. But you might be glad that they spared us the two biggest problems fathers have with their children.

**Ted:** *(Shakes his head in puzzlement.)*

**Charles:** What I mean is this. First, the search for a partner. Imagine Andy bringing home all kinds of girls, one after another. The first has purple hair, the second has tattoos, the next is a chain-smoker, the next swears like a trooper. Then comes a chick with big breasts and silicone where her brain should be. And finally there's one just out of the nick, because he's a psychologist and he wants to save her.

**Ted:** I'd give him a slap.

**Charles:** Well, he's found a nice girl from a good family. And not only is she pretty, she's clever too. Be glad that your problems are over.

**Ted:** *(ironically)* Do you happen to work in advertising? Nice girl, good family et cetera?

**Charles:** And the second point of stress for fathers? The wedding. One problem after another, rushing hither and thither, the wife hysterical throughout the preparation period. By the wife I mean the mother. Everything must be seen to be just right. Nothing must be forgotten. Then you have to stand around in a suit all day looking statesmanlike. Give me a break.

**Ted:** You're quite lazy, really, aren't you?

**Charles:** I may not have known you long, Ted, but I'm pretty sure you'd make none of the arrangements. You'd just tell Molly what to do.

**Ted:** I'm not standing here listening to this. *(He goes out to the garden.)*

**Charles:** *(calls after him)* Just think about it! *(to himself)* I feel a drink coming on. Some of the hard stuff. *(He enters the kitchen as Mary and Molly are coming out of it.)*

**Mary:** Where are we supposed to be?

**Molly:** *(looking around)* I think it's okay. I don't see anything broken.

**Mary:** The worst thing is, whatever our young ones do, the situation will stay the same. They're determined to complete their experiment.

**Molly:** I get that. Andy's as stubborn as his father. But I'm sorry all the same.

**Mary:** About the wedding? Me too. Because we weren't there, we don't have any photos of the day, or even any memories.

**Molly:** We won't forget this weekend in a hurry, though, will we? But I've got a suggestion about the wedding. We can make our own photos.

**Mary:** You've got a time machine, have you?

**Molly:** I don't need one. We can use photoshop. All we do is choose the clothes and some attractive surroundings, a wedding bouquet and so on, and then mix it all together with some photos of our kids. We can fill a whole photo album if we like.

**Mary:** Isn't that cheating?

**Molly:** Of course not. It's a reality of the digital age. You don't think people really live as they present themselves on Facebook, do you?

**Mary:** I see. The kids spring a secret wedding on us and we get them back with an album of fictional photos. Showing the wedding just as we would have it.

**Molly:** Exactly. We'll pay them back in their own coin.

*(Ted, Andy and Theresa return from outside.)*

**Ted:** Where's Charles?

**Mary:** In the kitchen. *(She approaches the door and calls.)* Charles! Come back to the ring! Round fifteen!

*(Charles returns from the kitchen.)*

**Ted:** Come here, Molly. *(Ed and Molly are on one side of the stage, the others on the other.)* We insist on a divorce.

**Charles:** And I insist on a post-wedding feast. Let's discuss the menu.

*(Andy, Theresa and Mary clap their hands with delight. Then they take Charles by the hand and perform a little dance around the table.)*

**Ted:** *(speaking to Molly)* They're ignoring us.

**Molly:** Obviously. It needs a firmer grip on reality.

**Ted:** Whose side are you on?

**Molly:** Yours, of course. But I do think you need to modify your position a little. Say by one hundred and eighty degrees.

**Ted:** One hundred and eighty degrees! That's the opposite of divorce. That means no divorce!

**Molly:** You can claim that your demand for a divorce was a kind of test, of the kind they tried on us.

**Ted:** He'll never buy that.

**Andy:** (*cries out*) Strawberries, nothing but strawberries! (*Goes back to conspiring quietly with the others.*)

**Molly:** I suppose not. We both know he can read us like an open book.

**Ted:** But if I back down, I'll lose face. I must hold my ground.

**Molly:** Then hold your ground somewhere else. Just don't compromise.

**Ted:** (*considers the suggestion*) That's not a bad idea...

**Mary:** (*shouts*) Bread and dripping? Over my dead body!

**Molly:** What are we waiting for? Go, tiger!

**Ted:** Watch this, then. Hey, you there!

(*Theresa, Andy, Mary and Charles turn to face him.*)

**Ted:** I've something to tell you all. And I'm afraid I must insist on it. In fact, it's absolutely non-negotiable. A total deal-breaker. I demand beef broth with liver dumplings.

**Theresa:** (*looking to the others*) Who's in favour?

(*All raise a hand.*)

**Theresa:** Motion passed. (*They resume their consultation.*)

**Ted:** (*to Molly*) Look at them eating out of my hand!

**Molly:** Keep it up, tiger.

**Ted:** Here goes. (*calls to Charles*) And the feast's on me!

**Charles:** No way. That's my department. The father of the bride pays for the wedding feast.

**Ted:** So what can I pay for? The wedding's over.

**Mary:** How about their wedding rings?

**Ted:** They don't have rings?

**Andy:** Yes, we do.

**Ted:** Come here, you two. (*He points at the ground before him.*) Now!

(*Theresa and Andy do as he tells them.*)

**Ted:** Show me your hand.

*(Theresa and Andy each put their left hand behind their back and show him their right.)*

**Ted:** The other hand.

*(Theresa and Andy each show him their left hand.)*

**Molly:** They really don't.

**Theresa:** Yes, we do. *(Theresa and Andy take out their mobile phones.)*

**Ted:** Your rings are photos on your mobiles?

**Andy:** Well, we couldn't go and buy them, could we? For that, we would have had to meet again before the wedding. And not meeting was a condition.

**Ted:** *(to Molly)* Are you sure you didn't drop him on his head when you were nursing him?

**Molly:** *(laughs)* I'm more interested in what went on at the wedding.

**Theresa:** Well, when they told us to exchange rings, we pulled out our phones and sent each other a picture message of a ring. Then we showed the pictures to the registrar.

**Molly:** And how did he react?

**Andy:** He looked pretty gobsmacked, to be honest. Then he muttered something about it being time he retired.

**Theresa:** That's right. If only he could get himself deselected, he said.

**Ted:** Very well. Let's all go to a jeweller's and buy the rings. You two choose them, I'll pay for them, and Mother will get emotional on everyone's behalf.

**Charles:** And we'll have the feast here. How about a big garden party?

**Ted:** Agreed. I can see it now. First, they put on the rings. Then they kiss and the mothers shed a tear or two. Then they make their solemn vow.

**Theresa:** What vow?

**Ted:** You will promise your parents in great solemnity that you will never surprise them again.

**Andy:** All right. *(to Theresa)* There's no harm in a promise.

**Ted:** Then comes the tossing of the bouquet. Do people still do that?

**Theresa:** If there's someone to toss it to.

**Charles:** Then for the godforsaken nosh-up. And the entertainments. Music, singing, dancing, pulling the leg of the groom and the mothers-in-law.

**Ted:** *(to Molly)* That went smoothly. All in all, a moral victory, I think.

**Molly:** I think so too, Father.

**Theresa:** Christ Almighty! Andy, look at the time! We'll miss the train.

**Andy:** If we don't get our things together now, we will. Maybe we'll catch the last carriage.

**Ted:** We must be leaving, too. *(to Andy)* Forget the train, we'll drive you.

**Charles:** I think we'll stay here. What do you say, Mother?

*(In reply, Mary shoves Charles. Andy brings the bag through.)*

**Theresa:** Bye, Mum. See you, Dad. We'll be back next weekend.

**Charles:** With your dirty laundry. I know.

**Andy:** *(to Mary and Charles)* It was very nice to meet you. And don't be angry with us. We really do believe that true love can be found through marriage.

**Charles:** Which is the very thing we wish for – for you and for us.

*(All goodbyes are said and the leavers depart. Mary and Charles are left alone. Each picks up a chair and sits down on it in the middle of the stage, facing the audience.)*

**Charles:** Well, Mother, what have we learned from our crisis response?

**Mary:** That we can get through anything. At first, I was a little worried you were losing your sense of humour. That would be terrible.

**Charles:** Terrible is when the fish don't bite. A newly married daughter is a doddle in comparison.

**Mary:** I wonder what kind of grandkids they'll give us.

**Charles:** Before they give us any, they'll probably divorce and remarry.

**Mary:** Or their holograms will marry in their place.

**Charles:** Or they'll marry robots.

**Mary:** How about extraterrestrials?

**Charles:** Or they'll be assigned partners by the Ministry of Marriage.

**Mary:** Or the General Health Insurance company, depending on their diagnosis.

**Charles:** Or marriage will no longer exist, as living in a couple will be out of fashion.

**Mary:** No longer cool.

**Charles:** Who knows, maybe in future marriage will be a crime. A restriction on personal freedom. You and I could go to prison.

**Mary:** What's the difference? Aren't we already serving a life sentence together?

*(Charles moves his chair closer to Mary's and puts his arms around her.)*

**Charles:** Like Theresa and Andy. *(The light on the stage gradually fades.)*

**Mary:** That's right – like our Teri with her Andy.

*(The stage is in darkness.)*

**Mary:** *(cries out)* Hey, stud! Stop that!

**Charles:** What do you mean, stop? Sex on demand, that's what they said.

*(The lights come up on stage and the actors take a bow.)*

THE END