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THE LIVING SECTION
[EXCERPT]

a play by

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CHARACTERS

ALAN, about 27

SARAH, Alan's sister, about 30

ROSE, Alan's mother, about 60

VINCENT, late 20s, Alan's partner

AL SR., Alan's father, about 60

GWYNNYTH, about 20, Alan's sister

MEG, early 20s, played by the actress who plays GWYNNYTH

CANDY, late 20s, played by the actress who plays SARAH

PEG, early 20s, played by the actress who plays GWYNNYTH

SETTING

Various locations in Minnesota. The present.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

(ALAN and SARAH in a restaurant. Fine food on cafeteria trays.)

ALAN

So what did you get?

SARAH

The, um, Sauté de Lapin au Vin Blanc.

ALAN

Isn't that rabbit?

SARAH

Uh-huh.

ALAN

I don't believe it.

SARAH

What?

ALAN

What kind of place serves rabbit?

SARAH

Lots of places. Don't tell me you've never heard of—

ALAN

(overlapping)

Of course I've heard of it, but...

SARAH

(overlapping)

Maybe they don't serve it at, I don't know, Denny's, but—

ALAN

F.Y.I., Sarah, I do not eat at Denny's.

SARAH

I never said you did.

ALAN

I wouldn't be caught dead in Denny's.

SARAH

All right already.

ALAN

I wouldn't even go in a Denny's parking lot to turn around.

SARAH

I wasn't talking about where you eat.

ALAN

Then why bring up Denny's?

SARAH

It was just an example. Nothing to do with you. Why are you so touchy today?

(ALAN shrugs.)

Is it Dad?

ALAN

I don't know.

SARAH

Alan—

ALAN

I don't know, okay?

So, how are things going with Jack?

SARAH

You know what he told me today? He's asking for custody of Danielle. He says because he only works thirty hours a week at that rinky-dink nonprofit job he'll be able to spend more quality time with her.

ALAN

What an asshole.

SARAH

That man is living proof that anyone who can say the words "quality time" with a straight face isn't human. He's the one who had the affair, and now he wants my daughter plus twenty grand a year in child support? Now I know how Mom and Dad lasted so long. The only thing that's a bigger pain in the ass than staying married is getting a divorce.

God, let's change the subject. How's the newspaper?

ALAN

You know, same old same old. I had to do that damn advice column again. It's supposed to rotate among all the writers in the Living section, but I keep getting stuck with it.

SARAH

You should say something. You don't want to do that column for the rest of your life.

ALAN

They'll probably pull the plug on it anyway. We hardly get any letters.

SARAH

Really?

ALAN

Whose stupid idea was it to do an advice column for teenagers? Teenagers don't ask for advice. They think they know everything already.

My spoon's all spotty.

SARAH

Use mine. I don't need it.

ALAN

Why'd you take it?

SARAH

I wasn't thinking.

(ALAN takes SARAH's spoon, examines it, and then wipes it on his shirt tail.)

ALAN

Do you know how much this salad was? Eight dollars.

SARAH

Don't you like it?

ALAN

It's a decent salad, sure, but that's not the point. You pay eight bucks a plate, and you have to carry it to your table yourself.

SARAH

It is a cafeteria-style restaurant.

ALAN

Why should I have to cart an eight-buck salad around myself? The silverware should be clean. And did you see that basket by the register? They expect you to tip them. I mean, what the fuck do they even *do* here?

SARAH

They make the food.

ALAN

The cook makes the food. You don't tip the cook.

SARAH

They work the register.

ALAN

You give them money, they punch a few buttons, they give you change. Big whoop. A machine even does the math for them.

SARAH

Well, I'm sure they only make minimum wage.

ALAN

Then where does my eight dollars go?

SARAH

I don't know, Alan, but these people count on their tips, and their employer knows this, and that's why they don't even make enough in a day to buy a decent meal at the place where they work. You've waited tables. You know the routine.

ALAN

Yeah, but I worked my ass off. What's she doing? Looking at a magazine. I'm supposed to give her fifteen percent for reading *Cosmo* all day?

(Pause)

SARAH

When are you going to see Dad?

ALAN

I don't know.

SARAH

You *are* going to see him, right?

(ALAN shrugs.)

Alan, he's in the hospital.

ALAN

I know. Mom left a message. It's not like it's anything serious.

SARAH

He wouldn't be in the hospital if it weren't serious.

ALAN

Mom said he had some kind of "episode," so he's under observation for a couple days. It didn't sound like a big deal.

SARAH

Episode. Attack is more like it.

ALAN

Well, Mom told me it was an episode. A little one.

SARAH

You know what she's like. A tornado could be blowing the house apart and she'd just say the breeze was just picking up a bit.

ALAN

She said I shouldn't worry. Over and over, "Alan, I don't want you to worry."

SARAH

If she says that more than once, you'd better be worried. You know that.

ALAN

I can't go second-guessing everything she says. I'd go crazy.

On top of everything else, this water's warm.

SARAH

Alan—

ALAN

Two bucks a bottle and they can't even chill it?

SARAH

Don't you even want to know what happened?

ALAN

I already know. He had some kind of episode—or attack, or whatever—and he'll be in the hospital for a couple of days.

SARAH

Aren't you even curious what kind of attack?

ALAN

I suppose, but...

SARAH

But what? But if you knew, you'd feel obligated to actually go and see him?

ALAN

Fine. Tell me what happened.

SARAH

He went fishing the other day, down by the causeway. When he was walking back, he... Nobody's sure exactly what happened. Nobody saw it, and Dad doesn't remember. He just collapsed or passed out two blocks from the house. Somebody happened to look out their window and saw him lying face down on the sidewalk, his fishing pole in one hand and a string of fish in the other. God knows how long he'd been there. We're not positive yet, but we think it was probably his heart.

ALAN

Jesus. How is he doing now?

SARAH

He's stable, thank God. They moved him out of intensive care this morning. Now they're deciding what to do next.

ALAN

He's all right, then?

SARAH

Given the circumstances, I guess he's doing okay. So will you go?

ALAN

Vin and I were going away this weekend. We're leaving tonight.

(seeing someone offstage)

Is that Mom?

SARAH

What do you know.

ALAN

What's she doing here?

SARAH

You got me.

ALAN

You planned this. You ambushed me.

SARAH

Shush.

(ROSE enters.)

Hi, Mom.

ROSE

Hi, dear. This is a nice surprise. Hello, Alan.

ALAN

Mom, what are you doing here?

ROSE

I was just walking down Nicollet Mall when I looked in the window and saw you.

ALAN

We aren't anywhere near the window.

ROSE

How long has it been since I've seen you, Alan?

ALAN

You called the other day.

ROSE

You weren't in

ALAN

You left a message.

(to SARAH)

Where are you going?

SARAH

Feed the meter.

(SARAH exits.)

ALAN

Mom, you never come downtown.

ROSE

I did today.

ALAN

You hate the city.

ROSE

This is a nice restaurant.

ALAN

It's okay.

ROSE

Do you come here often?

ALAN

Mom, I know you planned this. You and Sarah.

ROSE

Sarah might have mentioned that you two were having lunch.

ALAN

What do you want?

ROSE

Oh, I'm not hungry.

ALAN

I mean what do you want from me?

ROSE

I don't want anything. I saw you in here and I just wanted to say hello.

(Beat)

ALAN

Hello.

ROSE

It's funny I saw you in here, since I was just thinking of you.

ALAN

Is that right.

ROSE

Your father's been thinking of you, too.

ALAN

Mom, I can't. Vin and I are going to Hayward this weekend. We have to leave right after work so we can check into the bed and breakfast by nine.

ROSE

I'm sure you could reschedule.

ALAN

We planned to go this weekend so we could see the leaves changing. Besides, our schedules don't line up like this again until Thanksgiving.

ROSE

Gwynnyth is flying in. All the way from Tibet.

ALAN

Well, that's Gwynnyth. Dad loves Gwynnyth.

ROSE

Alan, I know you and your father have had your differences, but—

ALAN

Hamilton and Burr had "differences." Ann Landers and Abigail van Buren had "differences." Me and Dad...

ROSE

Didn't Ann and Abby eventually make up?

ALAN

That's not the point.

ROSE

I know the two of you don't always see eye to eye, but one of you has to swallow his pride and—

ALAN

Why does it have to be me? It's not my fault.

ROSE

Alan, if you look back, you'll see both of you share some of the blame.

ALAN

His irrational hatred is the moral equivalent of my sexual orientation?

ROSE

I don't mean your... not liking women.

ALAN

I'm gay. I'm not a misogynist.

ROSE

Some of the things you said to him were so cruel.

ALAN

Not half as cruel as what he said. Anyway, he was cruel first.

ROSE

I can't believe he's in the hospital and you don't even care.

ALAN

Who says I don't care?

ROSE

You won't go and see him.

ALAN

As if he'd want to see me.

ROSE

Don't be ridiculous. Of course he would.

ALAN

Why?

ROSE

He wants the whole family to be together again.

ALAN

No, Mom. That's what you want.

ROSE

Yes, but your father wants it, too. Don't you?

(Beat)

ALAN

Well, it ain't gonna happen 'til he says he's sorry.

(Beat)

ROSE

So, how's Victor?

ALAN

Victor?

ROSE

Yes, Victor.

ALAN

Victor who?

ROSE

Victor.

ALAN

I don't know any Victors.

ROSE

Your, you know, your friend.

(Beat)

ALAN

His name's Vincent.

ROSE

Something with a V.

ALAN

Vin's fine.

ROSE

Well, I suppose I should let you finish your lunch. It's a shame I'll have to tell your father you don't want to hear his apology.

ALAN

What apology?

ROSE

That's why he wants to see you. I just told you.

ALAN

You said he wanted the whole family together.

ROSE

Yes, so he can tell you he's sorry.

ALAN

He doesn't need the whole family there to tell me that.

ROSE

It doesn't really matter anyway since you're going to Wisconsin.

ALAN

Mom, it's perfectly obvious what you're trying to do. He never told you he wants to apologize to me.

ROSE

Maybe he never came out and said so, but after thirty-five years I think I can tell what he wants. I'll see you Monday, after the surgery?

ALAN

Mom, wait.

ROSE

You must have to get back to work. Have a wonderful time in Wisconsin.

(ROSE exits. ALAN fumes. SARAH returns.)

SARAH

She's gone?

ALAN

Yes, Sarah. Mom's gone. Is the meter well fed?

SARAH

Yup.

ALAN

It's ironic you had to feed the meter, seeing as how you parked in the *lot*.

SARAH

I don't think that's the correct usage of the word "ironic."

ALAN

Two peas in a pod, you two. Two shells in a shotgun.

Does Dad really want to apologize to me?

SARAH

You'll have to ask him.

ALAN

He's not here, so I'm asking you.

SARAH

I wouldn't know. You could ask Mom.

ALAN

I did ask her.

SARAH

What did she say?

ALAN

She said he does, but I don't believe her.

SARAH

Just because she's using something for leverage doesn't mean it's not true.

ALAN

Look, I really don't know if I can stop by, but I'll call. Tonight, as soon as we get to Hayward.

SARAH

You're not going to call.

ALAN

If you give me the number, I promise I'll call.

(Pause. SARAH writes the number on a napkin and slides it across the table to ALAN.)

SARAH

Tomorrow I'm going to ask him if you did call.

(ALAN puts the napkin in his pocket. They eat for a moment, without speaking.)

ALAN

We've established that a lot of restaurants serve rabbit, but what kind of person would actually *eat* it? How could somebody do that?

SARAH

Just put it in your mouth and chew.

ALAN

That could be Bugs Bunny you're eating. Or Roger Rabbit. You could be eating Thumper. Tell me, Sarah. How's Thumper?

(Beat. SARAH eats. ALAN slaps his hand against his thigh, making a thumping noise. SARAH throws down her fork.)

SARAH

Congratulations. You've made me lose my appetite.

ALAN

Aren't you going to finish that?

SARAH

Not now.

ALAN

That's like twelve bucks, isn't it?

Do you mind if I have it instead?

SCENE 2

(VINCENT in his and ALAN's apartment, preparing for a weekend trip. ALAN enters.)

VINCENT

Did you pack your blue sweater? It's supposed to be nippy this weekend.

ALAN

Uh, yeah.

VINCENT

Did you hear what I just said?

ALAN

Sure. Vin, have you seen my keys?

VINCENT

I thought we were taking my car.

ALAN

Maybe you should go ahead so we can check in by nine. I think I'm going to see my dad.

VINCENT

I thought you were going to call him.

ALAN

He's in the hospital. I should see him.

VINCENT

I thought it wasn't serious.

ALAN

Do you think he'd be in the hospital if it weren't serious?

VINCENT

Well, I can't argue with that, can I?

ALAN

Vin, come on.

VINCENT

No, go. He's in the hospital.

ALAN

What is with you? At least have a little sympathy.

VINCENT

Like he has for you?

ALAN

He's my father. He had a heart attack for Christ's sake. Vin...

VINCENT

I don't get it. One minute nothing's wrong, the next it's Terms of Endearment.

ALAN

I'm not making this up. He's sick. I have to go and see him.

VINCENT

And swing by the Saloon on the way?

ALAN

What's that supposed to mean?

VINCENT

You know perfectly well. Andrew told me.

ALAN

Told you what?

VINCENT

Last week, when you told me you had to stay late at the paper for some big "deadline," you were really whooping it up with Sean and the gang.

ALAN

So I stopped off for a drink on the way home.

VINCENT

Andrew saw you there at ten. You got home at one-thirty.

ALAN

Your point being?

VINCENT

I want to know why you felt you had to lie to me.

ALAN

I knew you wouldn't have wanted to come.

VINCENT

You could have at least asked.

ALAN

You hate Sean.

VINCENT

So what?

ALAN

I hadn't seen Sean in ages. I wanted to spend time with him without having to worry about you sulking by yourself at the end of the bar.

VINCENT

So basically you wanted to see your annoying friend and you didn't want me there.

ALAN

Yes.

VINCENT

Then for Christ's sake, just say you're going out to see Sean. Why lie to me?

ALAN

I knew it would hurt your feelings. I would have spent the rest of the night feeling guilty.

VINCENT

But you didn't feel guilty about lying?

ALAN

I feel guilty now.

VINCENT

Now that you've been caught? My feelings are hurt anyway, and now I'm wondering how trustworthy you really are.

ALAN

Christ, Vin. I'm not cheating on you.

VINCENT

I never said you were. Are you?

ALAN

No.

VINCENT

Are you sure?

ALAN

Yes.

VINCENT

How many other times have you lied about working late?

ALAN

Why don't you just rent a fucking polygraph?

VINCENT
How many?

ALAN
Not many.

VINCENT
"Not many" isn't a number.

ALAN
Three or four. Sometimes I just need a little space.

VINCENT
I swear, I saw more of you before we moved in together.

ALAN
We didn't have so many stupid fights then, either.

VINCENT
What are you trying to say?

ALAN
If you're so nostalgic for the days before we lived together, maybe we should... Never mind.

VINCENT
What? What were you going to say?

ALAN
Let's not go there. I'm sorry. I'm still adjusting to this whole domestic thing.

VINCENT
It's been almost a year.

ALAN
I know. I... I need you. I'm not going anywhere.

(They embrace.)

VINCENT
We'd better get going if we don't want to lose the deposit. Are you still going to see your dad?

ALAN
I don't know. I want to ride up with you. Would we have time to swing by the hospital on the way? I'd make it really fast. I promise.

VINCENT
Take your time.

ALAN

But the deposit—

VINCENT

Deposit, schmeposit. We've got time.

ALAN

You know what? Fuck it. I said I'd give him a call on the way up. That's what I'll do.

VINCENT

You sure?

ALAN

Yeah. Let's go.

[END OF EXCERPT]