

SANCTUARY

A Radio Play

CAST LIST

RICHARD & LISA – Husband and wife, childless, semi-retired in their late 40s. Married long enough to finish each other’s sentences but not long enough to appreciate the assistance.

CHARLEY – The critter guy. A few years short of retirement, though probably never will.

MEG – Animal rights activist. Early 30s. With her tattooed arms and chest, she dresses to display as many as legally possible.

TIME: Just before Thanksgiving.

SETTING: A craftsman home in a small, rural Oregon town.

PRODUCTION NOTES:

- For scene transitions, use the sounds of sanctuary animals, such as a cow, horse, rooster.
- Sound effects are noted throughout but may be omitted if they become distracting, such as “feet ascending stairs.”

ACT I

SCENE 1

RICHARD

I've been waiting all week for this.

(Sounds of wine bottle opening.)

LISA

Did you hear that?

RICHARD

That is the sound of a 2012 Applegate Valley Viognier.

LISA

No. Upstairs. Sounds like crying.

RICHARD

I didn't hear anything. Lisa, please. Sit down. Dinner's ready.

LISA

It's Theo. He's upset.

RICHARD

Well, maybe he just needs to cry a bit. C'mon, it's time you relaxed.

LISA

I can't. Not while he's suffering.

RICHARD

Why do you automatically assume he's suffering?

LISA

You think he wants to be alone up there? He can't stand to be apart from us.

RICHARD

But you were just up there.

LISA

I know, I know.

RICHARD

If you go back up, you'll be rewarding that behavior. He'll cry even more.

LISA

And I'm just supposed to ignore him? Like you?

RICHARD

Yes.

LISA

What if he hurt himself?

RICHARD

He didn't. Trust me. He just wants attention. Now, Lisa, for the love of God, let's eat. I've made chicken piccata, which at one point was warm.

LISA

And for me?

RICHARD

You can easily pick off the chicken.

LISA

Jesus, Richard.

RICHARD

Is it so awful if the nasty meat touches your pasta?

LISA

I specifically asked you to prepare my plate separately.

RICHARD

If you were down here helping instead of obsessing over Theo maybe I wouldn't have screwed it up.

LISA

I've made a real effort to cut back on meat, and I wish for once you'd support me.

RICHARD

Just because your diet is whacko doesn't mean I don't support you.

LISA

I'm going upstairs.

RICHARD

Wait! I'm sorry. I was kidding. Have some wine.

LISA

Promise me you'll spend time with him tomorrow.

RICHARD

I always do. An hour a day.

LISA

I need more than an hour. I've got that volunteer thing at the animal sanctuary.

RICHARD

For the speeding ticket? I believe that's called community service.

LISA

I was hardly speeding.

RICHARD

This isn't Seattle, and you don't have a job to get to on time. You can afford to drive a lot slower in this town.

LISA

He's crying again.

RICHARD

Let him be.

LISA

He just wants to see us, to know we haven't abandoned him. He doesn't understand. He hates me.

RICHARD

He doesn't hate you.

LISA

I'm a horrible parent.

RICHARD

Lisa, you're not. You're a wonderful parent.

LISA

Do you mean that?

RICHARD

Yes, with all my heart. But I want you to understand something, okay?

LISA
What?

RICHARD
Theo. Is. A cat.

LISA
Doesn't mean he's not miserable up there.

RICHARD
I agree. But we're following doctor's orders. We spent three grand on getting that back leg repaired and the only way it's going to heal is if he stays locked up in a place where he can't jump onto furniture, counters, beds. And our walk-in shower is a heck of a lot more spacious than that metal cage they told us to use.

LISA
It's cold in there.

RICHARD
It's lined with my comforter. Your Calvin Klein plush throw. A half-dozen pillows. Hell, I could sleep in there.

LISA
Is that a promise?
(then)
I'm kidding, kidding. Where's my glass? Okay, I want to make a toast. To Theo.
(then)
What's wrong?

RICHARD
(whispering)
Did you hear that?

LISA
Theo?

RICHARD
No. It's coming from the attic. A scratching sound. I sure hope we don't have squirrels nesting up there.

LISA
Maybe Barnaby's cold.

RICHARD
Barnaby?

LISA

A squirrel. He's a regular on the upstairs deck.

RICHARD

You've named a squirrel?

LISA

I've also sketched him a few times.

RICHARD

He posed?

LISA

Don't be silly. He just likes hanging out on the deck. I think he uses it to get to the bird feeder. Before Theo got hurt, he and Barnaby used to have staring contests through the window.

RICHARD

How can you name a squirrel? They all look alike.

LISA

I *know* Barnaby. His tail is short and fat, like he lost part of it. You better not hurt him.

RICHARD

I won't. I'll have someone else hurt him.

LISA

Richard, I'm serious.

RICHARD

We can't have an animal living in our attic.

LISA

We have one living in our bathroom.

RICHARD

That's different. Squirrels chew through wires. They could start a fire. We just bought this house, for Christ's sake.

LISA

I don't care. This is Ashland, Oregon. We live next to a national forest and you act as if animals are supposed to know they're not allowed near our house.

RICHARD

What if it's a family of rats?

LISA

Rats?

RICHARD

Yes, rats. We could have rats in our attic. Will you be naming them too?

LISA

Where were we? Oh yes. To Theo.

RICHARD

To Theo.

(Sound of glasses clinking.)

ACT I

SCENE 2

(Next day. Sounds of birds.)

RICHARD

Charlie, thanks for coming over so quickly. My name's Richard.

CHARLEY

That bird feeder yours?

RICHARD

It came with the house.

CHARLEY

Bad idea. Attracts all kinds of creatures.

RICHARD

Like birds?

CHARLEY

Like rats, raccoons, skunks.

RICHARD

Don't you want to get into the attic?

CHARLEY

Not yet. I conduct a comprehensive analysis of the perimeter before going inside. Identify all points of entry. The gap in that dryer vent. And that tree should be cut back. A squirrel—assuming it is a squirrel we're talking about—could drop right onto your roof and make his way inside through an eave.

RICHARD

You think it's a squirrel?

CHARLEY

Probably a rat. Neighborhood's full of them. You new in town?

RICHARD

Moved down from Seattle a few months ago.

CHARLEY

Kids?

RICHARD

Nope.

CHARLEY

Good.

RICHARD

You're child-free too?

CHARLEY

What? No. Kids spill food, attract rats.

RICHARD

Oh.

CHARLEY

Ashland is a strange little town. Too many people here feed the animals. Deer. Foxes. Bears. Conditions them to come looking for handouts.

RICHARD

The people or the deer?

CHARLEY

Both. I can take a look at that attic now.

RICHARD

Before we do that, my wife wanted me to ask if you use cruelty-free methods.

CHARLEY

Of course.

RICHARD

You do?

CHARLEY

Some exterminators use poison. Not me.

RICHARD

So you use cages.

CHARLEY

Cages? I use traps. Snaps the neck instantly. They don't feel a thing.

RICHARD

That's nice, I guess. My wife—we—were hoping you could remove the creature without actually killing the creature.

CHARLEY

What do you mean? Like catch and release?

RICHARD

Exactly. Catch and release.

CHARLEY

Richard, this ain't *Nature Planet*. I can't sit around in your attic waiting for a rat to wander on up. You see, rats don't return to the nest every night, sometimes not for weeks. You want cruelty free, you don't want an exterminator. You want a zookeeper. Now show me the attic.

*(Sound of front door closing.
LISA and MEG enter.)*

LISA

Welcome to our humble studio, Meg.

MEG

Are you sure I can stay here?

LISA

Of course. I'm not using it, what with our injured cat demanding all my attention. I should move my art supplies out of the way.

MEG

Did you draw this?

LISA

The squirrel? Yeah, I know it's silly.

MEG

It's beautiful.

LISA

You think?

MEG

You've really captured his personality.

LISA

His name is Barnaby. You might see him around.

MEG

I've always had a weak spot for the so-called road-kill animals. A few years ago me and my friends did this protest down in LA to draw attention to the carnage. We lay naked along the highway in various poses.

LISA

Completely naked?

MEG

Activism isn't just about holding up signs. It's about letting go of inhibitions, using your body, your sexuality, to open eyes and minds. Why do you think I have the word *Vegan* tattooed across my chest? It's the best billboard I have—why not make the most of it?

LISA

If only I had a billboard like yours.

MEG

It's not the size that matters. It's the location. You have very nice legs.

LISA

You think?

MEG

I do. You could put a tattoo right here, on your calf.

LISA

What would it say?

MEG

Vegan. How long have you been?

LISA

How long? Oh gosh, it's hard to pick an exact date.

MEG

Most people remember the day, sometimes down to the hour.

LISA

I've never been good with time. My husband can vouch for that.

MEG

Is he vegan?

LISA

Hardly. He keeps saying I'm going through a phase. I think he's in denial.

MEG

Denial is stage one.

LISA

What's stage two?

MEG

Anger. But you'll get used to it. If you're not pissing people off, you're not doing things right.

LISA

Meg, speaking of pissing people off, what are you doing for Thanksgiving?

MEG

Trying to pretend that 46 million turkeys haven't just died. In other words, drinking.

LISA

Why don't you come over and drink with us? I'll cook up a plant-based feast. You can meet Theo.

MEG

Is that your husband?

LISA

No, Theo's the cat. But you can meet Richard, too.

MEG

Will he be eating turkey?

LISA

Nope. He just doesn't know it yet.

ACT I

SCENE 3

(Later that day. Courtyard. Sounds of RICHARD breathing heavily, having finished a jog.)

RICHARD

(calling out)

Lisa? You in the studio? You left the door open.

(Sound of a shower running.)

Lisa? Why are you showering in here? You want company?

(Sound of water turning off. Shower curtain yanked aside.)

MEG

You must be Richard.

RICHARD

Oh, my god, I'm sorry. I thought you were Lisa.

MEG

Do I look like Lisa?

RICHARD

No. You. The front door was open.

MEG

I know. And now the shower curtain is open. With you standing there. Staring.

RICHARD

I didn't mean to.

MEG

You didn't?

RICHARD

No. I mean. I didn't mean to barge in. I was out there. I saw the open door. I heard the water. I thought a pipe had burst.

MEG

I think it very nearly did.

RICHARD

This is my house, right?

MEG

Richard, I'm Meg. Your wife said I could stay here.

RICHARD

Lisa?

MEG

Is there another?

RICHARD

No. I just. How do you two know each other?

MEG

We met at the animal sanctuary. Where I work. I should probably get dressed.

RICHARD

Me too. I mean, undressed. I mean. I need a shower.

(quietly)

A cold shower.

(Sound of front door opening.)

LISA

That was a long run.

RICHARD

I met our neighbor.

LISA

Now, before you fly off the handle, I was going to ask you—

RICHARD

It's okay.

LISA

What's okay?

RICHARD

It's silly to leave that studio empty when there are people out there who need a place to live.

LISA

We're talking about the same person, right? Meg?

RICHARD

The girl with the tattoos on her—yes. Meg.

LISA

I was worried you'd take one look and want nothing to do with her.

RICHARD

I'd like to think I'm a bit more open minded than you give me credit for.

LISA

How far did you run exactly?

RICHARD

Not far. You know, maybe we should invite her over for Thanksgiving.

LISA

I already did. Why are you suddenly feeling social?

RICHARD

I figured it would be a nice gesture. We can't eat a whole turkey ourselves.

LISA

Meg doesn't eat turkey. She's vegan.

RICHARD

So that's what was written on her—wait, vegan is worse than vegetarian, right?

LISA

It's better. No dairy. No eggs. No leather.

RICHARD

I'm glad you're not that extreme.

LISA

I am now.

RICHARD

Since when?

LISA

Since meeting Meg.

RICHARD

You can't just become a vegan like that.

LISA

Why not? It's not as if I need a license. I was headed in that direction anyway. Just another small step in my journey toward a more compassionate life.

RICHARD

That's more than a small step, Lisa. That's leaping across the goddamned Grand Canyon.

LISA

You could take this opportunity to join me.

RICHARD

I don't think so. That is one leap too far.

(then)

Wait a second, you're serious about this? No turkey?

LISA

That's right.

RICHARD

Thanksgiving is supposed to be a day of giving thanks, not a day of giving up everything to be thankful for.

LISA

Don't be so dramatic. It'll be fun. Instead of eating a turkey we'll adopt a turkey with a donation to the sanctuary. Meg works there, you know. I was also thinking you and I could start volunteering a few days a week.

(then)

Are you feeling okay? You don't look so well.

RICHARD

Maybe I did run too far.

ACT I**SCENE 4**

(Wildwoods Animal Sanctuary. Sounds of animals.)

LISA

How's Abigail doing?

MEG

She's taken to caring for Buddy, the calf we adopted six months ago. And I think Buddy likes having someone to look after him.

LISA

It's so peaceful here. My parents used to take me to the zoo every summer and I hated going because the animals never looked happy. Never had enough room. Always pacing. But here, they have so much room. And there's no pacing. It's the opposite of a zoo.

MEG

One day we'll look back at zoos the way we look back at the Roman coliseum. When animals retire with us, they're not expected to perform or be visible to humans. They're expected to be themselves, finally, themselves. The horses, they were raised to carry humans on their backs—the cows, to have milk stolen from their bodies. The pigs, to give birth on demand. And now, they can relax, and recover, as much as possible. They get a few moments in life to be as they were intended. They can't tell us they're happy. But you can see it. In the way they walk, or in how deeply they sleep. Or the first time they begin to play with one another.

LISA

I could learn something from them.

MEG

What do you mean?

LISA

I've been semi-retired now for three months and I feel more stressed than I was in Seattle. I was raised by a pair of type As. Maybe that's the problem. A fear of standing still. Or wasting time. I can't even listen to music on the radio anymore; it has to be NPR. And now that all my old college friends are connected on these social networks, we're still competing, showing off our babies and cars and second homes like report cards for all to see. I wanted out. I really did. I thought coming down here would help. But you can't escape the Internet, can you?

MEG

It's not about escaping. Your problem is that you're still performing for others. It's like you've got a bit in your mouth and spurs at your sides. And you're being pushed along at full gallop.

LISA

So how do I stop?

MEG

Simple. You toss off your rider.

LISA

Sounds simple enough. Growing up, I never liked the taste of meat. But I always cleaned my plate, did what I was told. I wanted to be the good girl.

MEG

Take it from me. Bad girls have more fun.

LISA

We'll test out that theory tomorrow, when, according to Richard, I will ruin Thanksgiving as he knows it.

MEG

Richard should be grateful that you haven't left him already.

LISA

I think he has a crush on you.

MEG

Too bad for him. I'm not his type.

LISA

Not into men?

MEG

I'm into men. And women. Just not carnivores.

ACT I**SCENE 5**

(Morning. Sounds of LISA sniffing. RICHARD enters.)

RICHARD

Lisa? What's wrong?

LISA

Nothing.

RICHARD

Did somebody die?

LISA

No, no. Meg emailed me an undercover video from a turkey farm in Missouri.

RICHARD

Not another one.

LISA

It's not another one. The last one was a *chicken* farm. This is turkeys. I'll send you the link.

RICHARD

No. Please.

LISA

Why not?

RICHARD

Because I don't like to watch those videos.

LISA

You of all people should be watching. What people do to these animals. You have no idea.

RICHARD

I have a pretty good idea. But can I help it if I crave turkey for Thanksgiving?

LISA

Too bad. You're outnumbered, two vegans to none.

RICHARD

And what if I had a friend over who wanted turkey?

LISA

For that to happen you would first need a friend.

RICHARD

What I need is my protein.

LISA

That's crap, and you know it. You can get just as much protein from beans and tofu, and with none of the artery-clogging cholesterol.

RICHARD

Why is it that every conversation between us gets interrupted by a public service announcement?

(Sound of the fridge opening.)

Hey, where's the milk?

LISA

I don't drink milk anymore.

RICHARD

But I do.

LISA

Then you can go buy some.

RICHARD

I'm supposed to get my own groceries now?

LISA

Meg made a very good point the other day. She said that if women stopped serving meat for dinner, most men would become vegetarians overnight. But most women are too worried about disappointing their husbands to take a stand.

RICHARD

You appear to have cleared that hurdle without a hitch.

LISA

I know this is challenging. It's going to take some getting used to.

RICHARD

For you or for me?

LISA

For us, Richard, for us.

RICHARD

But I'm not vegan!

(Faint sound of cat meowing.)

LISA

You woke Theo.

RICHARD

I have ears.

LISA

It doesn't bother you?

RICHARD

Of course it bothers me. That's why I've got noise-canceling headphones.

LISA

You could also, I don't know, go up there and see what's wrong.

RICHARD

I'd be howling too if I was stuck up there. Look, we've just got four weeks left and he'll be a free cat.

LISA

I don't know if I can make it that long.

RICHARD

What are you saying? That you're liable to snap before his leg heals?

LISA

I'm just exhausted, that's all. You complain about not having the peace and quiet you need to write your great American novel. But I haven't done any painting either.

RICHARD

This is ironic, isn't it? You're not sleeping. We're on edge, arguing all the time. And over a 12-pound cat. If Theo were a child he's be in junior high now and at least we'd have something to show for all our efforts besides a pillow-lined master bath.

LISA

So you want children now?

RICHARD

No. It's just that we didn't have kids so we could be free. Weekends free of birthday parties and soccer matches. Traveling the world on a whim. I felt like we were in on some secret that nobody else had figured out. But the fact is we simply replaced one child with another, one that will never leave home.

(then)

Where are you going?

LISA

I'm going to the sanctuary—traveling on a whim. Want to come?

RICHARD

I've—I've got plans.

LISA

I'll bet you do.

ACT I

SCENE 6

(Sound of a blender gone wild.)

LISA

Dammit!

RICHARD

What's going on in here? Did something explode?

LISA

The top came off the blender.

RICHARD

It's like a crime scene; I can't even see the countertop. What is this stuff?

LISA

Cashews. I'm making cashew cheese. And failing. I should have practiced beforehand.

RICHARD

Lisa, why are you doing this to yourself? You realize we still have real cheese in the fridge.

LISA

That's not the point.

RICHARD

But look at you. You're running around like a madwoman. If you had simply cooked our normal meal you'd be sitting on the couch drinking wine right now.

LISA

This *is* our normal meal.

(Knock at the front door.)

Please tell me that isn't Meg.

(Sound of door opening.)

CHARLEY

Happy Thanksgiving.

RICHARD

Come on in, Charley.

LISA

I didn't know you were working today.

CHARLEY

Working?

RICHARD

Charley, I believe I heard a trap go off last night in the attic.

CHARLEY

I'll have a look. You two don't mind if I step away for a moment, do you?

LISA

Not at all.

CHARLEY

Oh, and before I forget, here's a bottle of wine. Nothing fancy.

(Sound of heavy feet ascending stairs.)

LISA

Why do I get the feeling Charley is planning to stay awhile?

RICHARD

Because I invited him.

LISA

You invited the rat guy to our Thanksgiving?

RICHARD

He prefers *critter guy*.

LISA

Why on earth did you do that?

RICHARD

You said I needed to start making friends.

LISA

Yes, but doesn't he have his own family to spend the day with?

RICHARD

His wife died a few years ago. Kids live across the country.

LISA

Well, I hope he's not expecting turkey.

RICHARD

That's just it. Charley is very old-school about Thanksgiving.

LISA

Oh. I see what you're doing. It's not going to work.

RICHARD

He's our guest, Lisa

LISA

He's *your* guest and it wouldn't kill him to go without meat for a day.

(lowers voice)

He could stand to lose a few.

RICHARD

You said that if I had a guest who wanted turkey that we could serve it.

LISA

Richard, please. Don't you think that's just a little bit insulting to Meg?

RICHARD

So it's okay to insult Charley instead?

LISA

Why are you doing this to me? I am going crazy as it is just trying to decipher these recipes.

RICHARD

What are you cooking, anyway?

LISA

I am trying to make a lentil casserole, braised mushroom stew, gnocchi with tomatoes and eggplant, and, if I haven't yet died of a heart attack, a white bean butternut and kale soup. With vegan pecan pie for dessert. Oh, shit!

(Sound of frantic opening and closing of cupboard doors.)

RICHARD

What's wrong?

LISA

I forgot something. Damn it!

RICHARD

What?

LISA

Vegetable broth. They come in little cubes.

RICHARD

We have cubes.

LISA

Those are *chicken* cubes.

RICHARD

Meg won't know.

LISA

Of course she'll know. Can you please run out and pick up some?

RICHARD

If I leave this house I'm coming home with a turkey.

LISA

Fine. I'll go out.

RICHARD

This is nuts. Just use the chicken cubes.

(Knock on front door.)

LISA

Oh, God. That's her.

MEG

(calling out)

Hello. It's the vegan who came to dinner.

LISA

Hi Meg, come on in.

(whispering)

Please don't let her in the kitchen. I don't want her to see this.

RICHARD

Hey, Meg. Let me take you up to meet Theo.

MEG

Before you do that, you got any nutritional yeast I can use?

RICHARD

Nutritional yeast?

MEG

Yeah.

RICHARD.

That sounds like a question for Lisa.

MEG

Why?

RICHARD

Because I'm not a woman.

MEG

You have no idea what nutritional yeast is, do you?

LISA

Hi, Meg. Happy Thanksgiving.

MEG

Your husband thinks I have some sort of yeast infection.

RICHARD

How am I supposed to know what nutritional yeast is?

MEG

I'm addicted to that shit. I was going to add it to this snack mix I brought over.

LISA

How nice of you.

MEG

Can I help with the cooking?

RICHARD

Do you have a hazmat outfit?

(Sound of heavy footsteps.)

CHARLEY

False alarm. The traps are empty.

MEG

Who's this?

RICHARD

This is Charley. Charley, Meg.

CHARLEY

Hi there.

MEG

Have I seen you before?

RICHARD

Charley is the—

LISA

Charley has been helping us clean out the attic.

CHARLEY

That's one way of putting it.

LISA

Richard, why don't you talk to Charley about the this evening's menu while I take Meg up to meet Theo.

(Sounds of feet ascending stairs.)

RICHARD

Right. Charley, I'm afraid I have some bad news. There was a little miscommunication between me and Lisa and, well, there's no turkey.

CHARLEY

No turkey?

RICHARD

I understand if you want to leave.

CHARLEY

What if I were to find us a turkey?

RICHARD

I couldn't ask you to do that. Besides, nothing's open.

CHARLEY

I make no promises. But they don't call me the critter guy for nothing.

(Sound of front door closing following by feet running downstairs.)

LISA

Where's Charley?

RICHARD

He stepped out.

LISA

He was upset, wasn't he?

RICHARD

Actually, he took the news surprisingly well. Where are you going?

LISA

Where do you think? Just do me a favor and keep Meg far away from Charlie. She can't find out what he does for a living. I don't want anyone getting hurt.

RICHARD

Meg will be fine.

LISA

I'm talking about Charlie.

ACT I

SCENE 7

(Sound of a manual typewriter.)

MEG

Did I just travel through a time machine?

RICHARD

What?

MEG

That typewriter. Lisa told me you were a bit older than her but I had no idea.

RICHARD

Very funny.

MEG

Where is everybody?

RICHARD

Out running errands.

MEG

And what are you working on?

RICHARD

A novel.

MEG

Now it all makes sense.

RICHARD

What do you mean?

MEG

A typewriter is the perfect device for someone stuck in the past.

RICHARD

I'm not stuck. And I'm no luddite if that's what you're getting at.

MEG

I just think it's very interesting that you have no problem surviving without spell-check yet you can't go a day without meat.

RICHARD

Humans don't need spell-check to survive. You can talk all you want about tofu but if we were cavemen, we'd be back killing animals by hand.

MEG

Oh yes, the paleo argument. Humans have adapted to wearing clothing, using electricity, driving cars, talking on cellphones—and yet when it comes to dinner, we are completely incapable of evolution.

RICHARD

It's in our DNA.

MEG

Apes live almost entirely on plants. How do you explain that one, Mr. Professor?

RICHARD

I don't want to argue with you. I've done enough of that already with Lisa.

MEG

It wouldn't kill you to support your wife once in a while.

RICHARD

You don't know my wife. If I hold strong, this diet will pass like all other diets that came before.

MEG

This is not just any diet, Richard. This is a way of life.

RICHARD

It's a way of life that I won't be living.

(Sound of front door opening.)

CHARLEY

Dinner is served.

MEG

Holy crap!

CHARLEY

Isn't he a beaut?

RICHARD

You killed a wild turkey?

CHARLEY

And a big one at that. Nine pounds. No need to defrost this fella.

MEG

I'm going to be sick.

CHARLEY

I guess I won't ask you to help me skin him.

MEG

Was this your idea?

RICHARD

No. I thought he was running to the store, not the woods.

MEG

I can't believe you, the both of you. How are you going to explain this to your wife?

RICHARD

I'll tell her that it's just part of Charley's job.

MEG

Job? You're that exterminator?

CHARLEY

I prefer critter guy.

(Sound of a mouse trap snapping shut.)

MEG

What the hell was that?

CHARLEY

Sounds like we just caught ourselves a rat.

MEG

And now you have your appetizer.

RICHARD

Wait! Meg! Come back!

CHARLEY

Looks like it's just going to be you and me.

RICHARD

You can say that again.

(Sound of tires screeching.)

What was that?

CHARLEY

Looks like your wife's car.

RICHARD

Lisa?

CHARLEY

Don't worry, she's walking away. Looks a little shaken up.

RICHARD

Lisa? Lisa, are you okay?

MEG

Lisa hit a squirrel.

RICHARD

Oh, thank God.

MEG

She's in shock, Richard.

RICHARD

What are you holding? Lisa?

MEG

What do you think?

RICHARD

This isn't *that* squirrel? The short tail?

MEG

It's Barnaby. Just place him on the porch, hon. We can give him a proper burial later.

CHARLEY

You know, I could skin the squirrel too. Depends on how hungry you all are.

RICHARD

The turkey is enough, Charley.

LISA

Turkey?

CHARLEY

Richard told me you needed one, so I shot one above Lithia Park.

LISA

Richard, how could you?

RICHARD

It was an honest mistake. Lisa? Honey?

(Sound of footsteps heading up stairs.)

MEG

Richard, go up with her.

RICHARD

Not yet. The cat will calm her down. She just needs time with Theo.

MEG

Theo and a Xanax maybe. I'm serious. She's losing her shit. If you don't go up there, I will.

RICHARD

Leave her a moment. The cat will calm her down.

MEG

This is all your fault.

RICHARD

I didn't run over the damn squirrel.

CHARLEY

Hey, Richard, you got a carving knife?

RICHARD

Top drawer in the kitchen.

MEG

She's been on edge all day because you and critter guy insisted on eating turkey.

RICHARD

The only reason she's on edge is because she's been busting her to ass to cook you the perfect meal. Would it have killed you to eat chicken stock?

MEG

That's what her errand was about?

RICHARD

Yes. She didn't have any vegetarian cubes, and she didn't want to offend her precious houseguest. So in an effort to save one animal's life, she ends up taking another.

MEG

I'm going to go check on her.

RICHARD

No. Meg – wait!

(Sound of feet running upstairs.)

Crap. Now I'm going to look like a total ass because I'm not up there comforting my wife. But it was a squirrel, for crying out loud. Does every road kill deserve a 21-gun salute?

CHARLEY

I can't find the knife, Richard.

RICHARD

It should be here. Unless Lisa took it.

MEG

(calling out)

Richard. Call 9-1-1.

ACT I**SCENE 8**

(Hospital sounds.)

LISA

How long have I been asleep?

MEG

A few weeks.

LISA

What?

MEG

Just messing with you. It's only been a few hours.

LISA

That's not funny.

MEG

Hospitals bring out the dark side in me.

LISA

Where's Richard?

MEG

In the hall. Pacing. You know, you're supposed to cut along the veins, not against them. Ensures the veins don't close up, so you bleed out.

LISA

I wasn't trying to bleed out.

MEG

You did a pretty good job of fooling me.

LISA

I was just so, so angry—

MEG

I know. You had a hell of a day. But you know these squirrels. Sometimes you just can't avoid them.

LISA

I was going too fast. I always go too fast.

MEG

You're being too hard on yourself.

LISA

In Seattle, there was this squirrel that used to frequent our apartment balcony. I think the previous tenant used to feed him, so I continued feeding him. I know I shouldn't have because it kept him coming around our street. Then one rainy morning I was headed out to work and I saw him. In the middle of Western Ave. A body flushed out of a truck's wheel well. Blood dripping out of his mouth, still alive, still moving, trying to make it back to the sidewalk. Then another set of wheels. And another. I don't remember running into the street but apparently I did. I do remember our doorman, picking me up from the sidewalk. I was holding this motionless animal in my hands. You know what the doorman said? He said, "It's just a squirrel." I could have strangled him right then and there. *Just*. Like Theo is *just* a cat. I'm *just* a crazy cat lady. How many lives have been ruined by that word?

MEG

I'm sorry.

LISA

That's why we're here, you see. Living in this tiny Oregon town, far from the city streets and the highway and rush hour, and I was going to get it right this time. So what do I do? I drive too fast. Because I'm crazy out of my mind with my husband resenting me and me trying to do something right for once. Cook a compassionate meal. Cruelty fucking free.

MEG

It's not your fault.

LISA

Like hell it isn't.

MEG

Fair enough. You're going to have to learn to live with that. Just like you're going to have to learn to live with the knowledge that you spent most of your life responsible for the death of thousands of animals. For the record, so do I.

LISA

You ate animals?

MEG

Of course. I'm from St. Louis. I was raised on pork chops and chicken wings. The day I told my parents I was giving up meat, I swear I thought my dad was going to hit me. I should have told him I liked girls while I was at it. That would have been easier. People don't take sexuality personally. But tell them you're never going to eat your mother's meatloaf again, and you've got a family crisis.

LISA

How do you turn it off? This awful awareness?

MEG

You can't turn it off. I find vodka helps.

RICHARD

(calls from hall)

Lisa?

MEG

I'd be happy to kick him out of here. Or just kick him.

LISA

No. It's okay. You can open the door.

MEG

C'mon in, Richard.

LISA

Bye, Meg. Thanks for coming.

RICHARD

How are you feeling?

LISA

I'm fine. How's Theo?

RICHARD

He's wondering where you are.

LISA

When can I go home?

RICHARD

In an hour or so. Someone from psych needs to see you.

LISA

Oh.

RICHARD

I am sorry. About the squirrel.

LISA

His name is Barnaby.

RICHARD

I'm sorry about Barnaby.

LISA

But you're not sorry about the turkey.

RICHARD

I'm sorry that things have gotten so tense between us. I don't understand why I have to change my life just because you decided to change yours.

LISA

I used to feel like this marriage was my sanctuary. I could be myself around you.

RICHARD

You still can.

LISA

Not without being ridiculed. Treated like I'm crazy.

RICHARD

Lisa, you cut your wrists over a squirrel.

LISA

It wasn't only about the squirrel. That's my point. I need to feel like I can be myself, and who I am now is a vegan.

RICHARD

Our first date. Where did we go?

LISA

You know where.

RICHARD

Tell me.

LISA

Capitol Grille.

RICHARD

Right. I had the steak, and you had...

LISA

Richard, please.

RICHARD

What did you order? What did you eat?

LISA

Veal. Are you trying to make me feel worse?

RICHARD

No. Not at all, Lisa. I'm just saying that some of my best memories are of the meals we shared. The Fenway Franks at Red Sox games. All those nights out at Legal Seafood. Am I supposed to regret all of that?

LISA

Just the food.

RICHARD

I can't regret one part and not the rest. I don't regret any of it. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I'm a mass murderer of animals just like Meg says. I don't care. It's who I am. It's how I was raised. It's in me.

LISA

It's not in me. Not anymore.

RICHARD

This is all my fault.

LISA

It's not. It's my journey.

RICHARD

It is my fault. If Theo hadn't gotten hurt, you wouldn't have gotten obsessed with the—with Barnaby—and we wouldn't be here right now. I started this.

LISA

I'm the one who went vegan. And you didn't run over Barnaby—I did that.

RICHARD

I hurt Theo.

LISA

You what?

RICHARD

I hurt Theo. I lied to you.

LISA

What did you do?

RICHARD

He was on the counter. I yelled at him to get down, but he wouldn't, just like always. So I squirted that water bottle at him, and for some reason he wasn't expecting it because he practically fell off the counter trying to get away. He landed wrong. That's how he hurt his leg. He wasn't playing, like I told you. He was running away from me.

LISA

He could have done the same thing on his own.

RICHARD

But he didn't. I did it to him. And I don't even know why I did it, only that he drives me insane when he jumps on that damn counter. So what if he licks the stove—what do I care? Except that I do. I've always wanted him to, I don't know, not act so much like a cat. I won't make fun of your diet anymore. I promise.

LISA

I don't blame you for Theo. Or Barnaby. I don't blame you for not supporting my lifestyle. You are the same man I married. I'm the one who changed.

RICHARD

That's okay. We'll figure it out.

LISA

There's nothing to figure out. This isn't a negotiation. There's nothing to compromise. You believe that eating animals is okay, and I don't. And as trivial as that may seem to you, it means everything to me. That's why I think we need to take a break.

RICHARD

Break?

LISA

I would appreciate, before I get home tomorrow, that you move into the studio.

RICHARD

It's my home too.

LISA

I'd move to the studio myself, but I want to be with our cat.

RICHARD

What about Meg?

LISA

Let me worry about her.

RICHARD

It's all the drugs. You're not thinking clearly.

LISA

I've never been more clear.

RICHARD

Fine. I'll move out of the damn house. That house, by the way, was my sanctuary. Not that you care. But I'll move out because you want me out. You want the house. Fine. Take the fucking house. Take the fucking cat.

ACT I

SCENE 9

(Courtyard sounds. Knock on studio door.)

RICHARD

Pack up. You're being evicted.

MEG

What's the hurry?

RICHARD

None of your business.

MEG

She kicked you out, didn't she?

RICHARD

It's none of your business.

MEG

It's about time.

RICHARD

Is this your idea of activism? Breaking up marriages?

MEG

You did that all on your own, Richard. Would it have killed you to share one of her meals for once? Or take her to the Red Onion?

RICHARD

The Red Onion is for health nuts and hippies.

MEG

And the occasional happily married couple.

RICHARD

Lisa was perfectly happy as a part-time vegetarian, and then you come along with your extremism and suddenly she's not good enough. She goes from savior to sinner overnight. And all to please you.

MEG

She's not doing it for me.

RICHARD

Of course she is. She looks up to you. She envies your free-spirited life. And I watch her with her new cookbook and the websites, and all I can see is a woman running a race without an end.

MEG

You make it sound harder than it is.

RICHARD

Answer me this. Can you be 99 percent vegan?

MEG

What do you mean?

RICHARD

I mean, can you be vegan six days out of the week and on day seven splurge on a Bacon Egg & Cheese? Would you still be vegan?

MEG

Of course not.

RICHARD

Even most religions aren't that severe. You can be a Christian and still sin on occasion.

MEG

Veganism isn't a religion.

RICHARD

Oh, it is. You want everyone to feel guilty, so they come to you. The church of veganism. To wash away their sins. And let's not forget the side benefit—you get to judge others, all of us carnivorous heathens. And you have your gurus. Your tithing. And your endless debates over which celebrity is a real vegan or just a poseur.

MEG

We don't promise salvation.

RICHARD

Sure, you do. You promise salvation by way of compassion. You preach that not to be a vegan is to live in sin.

MEG

I'm not sure what you're trying to prove here, Richard. All I can say is that I'd rather be an imperfect vegan than a perfect carnivore.

RICHARD

Where are you going?

MEG

Home.

RICHARD

That's my home.

MEG

Not anymore, it's not.

RICHARD
You're moving in with my wife?

MEG
That's right. Your wife—make that ex-wife—invited me.

RICHARD
Fine. You can have her.

MEG
Oh I intend to.

RICHARD
What?

MEG
Bye, Richard.

ACT I

SCENE 9

(Living room. Sounds of a coffee maker.)

MEG
Hey, sleepyhead. How you feeling?

LISA
I can't believe I slept in. What's all this?

MEG
I once worked as a sous chef at a vegan joint in New York. Picked up a thing or two.

LISA
You spoil me.

MEG
That's the idea.

LISA
About what happened last night...

MEG
You want an encore performance?

LISA
I, I don't know what came over me.

MEG
I do. Me.

LISA
I've never done this sort of thing before.

MEG
Do you regret it?

LISA
No. Not at all. Do you?

MEG
What do you think?

LISA
I think you have very few regrets.

MEG
Don't worry. I'm not the nesting type.

LISA
You serve animals, not people.

MEG
Right.

LISA
Maybe I could come out to the sanctuary with you. Spend the day. Would they let me sketch a few of the animals?

MEG
I don't see why not.

LISA
I was thinking I could donate my artwork. To help raise money.

MEG

That's a great idea. You are a special woman.

(The distant sound of a manual typewriter coming from the studio interrupts the moment.)

There he goes again. If he's going to keep this up, I might have to file a noise complaint.

LISA

It's okay. It's nice to hear him writing again.

MEG

I can't believe you lived with this racket.

LISA

I like typewriters too. That one over there is mine.

MEG

The red Olympia?

LISA

Richard gave it to me after I moved in with him.

MEG

I guess Victoria's Secret was closed.

LISA

You don't understand. There were plenty of men who would have given me lingerie or jewelry. I worked in marketing at a software company, and had no shortage of admirers. It didn't hurt any that the ratio of males to females there was about a hundred to one. I gorged myself on eligible men. Men with more disposable income than free time. They bought me everything, anything I wanted. It was only money to them, and they had too much of it. They were getting older, desperate for a wife and a family. I think that's why I was so drawn to Richard. He didn't want a family. And he didn't throw money at me. For months the only sign I had that he liked me were these goofy typewritten notes he sent via interoffice memo. His version of texting me.

MEG

Judging by the racket he's making next door, I'd say he just discovered sexting.

(In the distance, the sound of typewriter dinging.)

ACT I**SCENE 10**

(Sounds of hammering a post into the ground.)

RICHARD

Charley, I really appreciate you helping.

CHARLEY

When I heard you were living out here I felt a little bit responsible.

RICHARD

Thanksgiving was not your fault. I invited you.

CHARLEY

Where's the tattoo girl?

RICHARD

She's in there.

CHARLEY

She's living your wife?

RICHARD

It's temporary.

CHARLEY

I've heard that one before. Like I said, is a funny little town.

RICHARD

You think this sign will do any good?

CHARLEY

It can't hurt. Now hold it straight. A few more taps should do it.

(Sounds of more hammering.)

RICHARD

Barnaby would be proud.

CHARLEY

Who?

RICHARD

The squirrel.

CHARLEY

If I named every animal I came across I'd need a telephone book.

RICHARD

Do you ever feel guilty? About all the killing?

CHARLEY

Sometimes. But I tell myself that I'm not the judge nor the jury. I'm just the executioner.

(Sound of front door opening.)

MEG

Richard, what I have told you about keeping it down out here?

RICHARD

Evict me, why don't you?

CHARLEY

What do you think of the sign?

MEG

"Squirrel crossing." Not bad. Now you just need a skunk crossing sign, deer crossing sign, raccoon crossing sign—

CHARLEY

You'd run out of street first.

MEG

It's a nice gesture, Richard. There's hope for you yet.

CHARLEY

What about me?

MEG

You kill animals for a living.

CHARLEY

It's just a job.

MEG

Would you give it all up to have sex with me?

CHARLEY

Just tell me where and when.

MEG

Then there's hope for you too, Charley.

CHARLEY

Wait—where are you going?

RICHARD

I think she was speaking rhetorically.

CHARLEY

Ah well, I got places to be.

RICHARD

I hope to see you around.

CHARLIE

I can guarantee it. Your neighbor's got an ant infestation. Here comes your wife. See you later.

RICHARD

Lisa.

LISA

That squirrel looks awfully familiar.

RICHARD

I modeled him after Barnaby.

LISA

It's nice. Thank you.

RICHARD

Living out here I had no idea how many squirrel there were in our yard. I can hear them running across the roof. You know the sound that squirrels make? Like birds chirping?

LISA

I do.

RICHARD

I always thought it was birds making that noise. I never bothered to just stop and look up.

LISA

I'm surprised you can hear them over your typing. It sounds like your book is coming along.

RICHARD

It's not what I thought I would be writing.

LISA

Not a sci-fi thriller?

RICHARD

It's about an animal rights activist. She's a hero of sorts.

LISA

Hero?

RICHARD

Yeah, well, I suppose I'm starting to understand what it feels like to be an outsider. So, how are you and Meg doing?

LISA

I'm not entirely sure. Meg, you know, is a free spirit. But she's been good to me.

RICHARD

You deserve that. I'm sorry I wasn't more supportive.

LISA

If I were to do it again I might not have pushed you so hard. We go at our own pace.

RICHARD

Speaking of, how is Theo?

LISA

He's walking around, no limp. Desperately wants his freedom. You want to come say hi?

RICHARD

I'd love to. But it might be safer when your significant other is away, speaking of—

LISA

Meg, what's with the backpack?

MEG

A little last minute I know, but I have to be somewhere.

RICHARD

You're leaving?

MEG

Wipe that smile off your face, Richard. No, she didn't kick me out. There's a sanctuary in Utah. They need help, like real bad. And this sanctuary is on good footing now, so I go where I'm needed.

LISA

You're still needed here.

MEG

I rescue animals. Not people.

LISA

You do a little of both. When will I see you again?

MEG

I'm sure I'll pass through again before long.

RICHARD

You'll be in the studio next time.

MEG

If he doesn't dedicate his book to you, I'll kick his ass.

LISA

Don't worry, I'll do it first. Stay in touch, okay?

RICHARD

I guess the coast is now clear. Are you all right?

LISA

I am. I'm good actually. It hasn't been easy forgiving myself for killing Barnaby but I realized last night that if I hadn't been driving so fast I wouldn't have met Meg either. It's time I slowed down, learned to be more patient, with me, with you, with Theo, with the world.

RICHARD

I was thinking that after we give Theo his dinner, maybe you and I could go out to the Red Onion.

LISA

The Red Onion? You sure you'll survive?

RICHARD

I'm willing to take that chance. At least at the end of the evening we might have a restaurant memory that we both can look back on fondly.

LISA

At least until you get the check.

END