

A Thousand Variations On A Lie Told Once

A Play in Two Acts

by Stacey Lane

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Cast:

ABBY: Fifty-six year-old mother of Anna, Rena, and Whitney

PATRICK: Forty-eight year-old fiancé of Abby

WHITNEY: Thirty year-old daughter of Abby

RENA: Twenty-eight year old daughter of Abby

ANNA: Twenty-four year-old daughter of Abby

Setting: A living room

Time: The present on Christmas Eve

ACT ONE

(In the darkness, a crashing sound is heard. The lights come up on ABBY, standing bewildered, looking down at a dropped plate of Christmas cookies. She is dressed in festive holiday wear, standing in a living room decorated for Christmas. There is a Christmas tree modestly ornamented with a few presents underneath it. The room is filled with frog paraphernalia. There are many frog figurines, frog pictures, frog throws, frog rugs, frog clocks, frog lamps, and frog Christmas decorations. PATRICK rushes in.)

PATRICK: (As he is coming onstage) Honey, are you-

ABBY: No! Look!

PATRICK: (Stooping to pick up the cookies) It's no big-

ABBY: Yes, it is!

PATRICK: We'll just have to make-

ABBY: There isn't time!

PATRICK: We don't really need-

ABBY: Everything is ruined!

PATRICK: No, it-

ABBY: This is just a sign of how the rest of the evening is-

PATRICK: No, it isn't.

ABBY: How can you-

PATRICK: They're just cookies.

ABBY: I ruin everything.

PATRICK: No, you don't-

ABBY: Yes, I do.

PATRICK: No, you don't.

ABBY: Yes, I- Look, I don't have time for this.

PATRICK: Do you have time for this? (He grabs her and kissing her passionately.)

ABBY: No.

PATRICK: Oh, come on sweetheart. Don't worry so much.

ABBY: I've got to worry. This evening is going to be disastrous.

PATRICK: With that kind of attitude.

ABBY: Well, it is. I'm just being realistic.

PATRICK: Oh, come on. This is about family. This about having a good time and-

ABBY: I don't have a good time with my family.

PATRICK: Well, you should. You just need to-

ABBY: Look, when we get together, which we hardly ever do, there is a lot of tension.

PATRICK: We'll be fine. We just-

ABBY: Plus, I've got you to deal with.

PATRICK: What's that suppose to mean?

ABBY: They're not going to like you.

PATRICK: Of course, they are-

ABBY: First off, they're not going to like the idea of you.

PATRICK: I don't see how-

ABBY: And then when they actually meet you, they really aren't going to like you.

PATRICK: Gee, thanks.

ABBY: Oh, come on you know what I mean.

PATRICK: No, I don't.

ABBY: Well, you're very good looking.

PATRICK: Thank-you.

ABBY: They won't like that.

PATRICK: I don't see how my-

ABBY: You're better looking than their father.

PATRICK: Beauty is in the eyes of the-

ABBY: Then, there's your age.

PATRICK: So what? I'm-

ABBY: You're much younger than him.

PATRICK: I thought you said he was forty when he-

ABBY: I mean now. You are younger than he would be if he was alive now.

PATRICK: I still don't see-

ABBY: He was four years older than me and you are-

PATRICK: Eight years is not much considering-

ABBY: And then there's how we met.

PATRICK: A lot of people meet on AOL nowadays.

ABBY: Let's just leave that whole part out, okay?

PATRICK: Well, they're bound to ask how we met.

ABBY: Well, tell them something else.

PATRICK: I don't want to lie to them.

ABBY: Fine. I'll tell them something else.

PATRICK: That's not-

ABBY: They are not going to like you.

PATRICK: I think you established that.

ABBY: And then there's the money issue.

PATRICK: What issue?

ABBY: You have some.

PATRICK: So?

ABBY: They won't like that.

PATRICK: I don't see how they would even-

ABBY: The ring. They'll see my ring and they will know. It's bigger than-

PATRICK: Than the one their father gave you. Yes, I'm seeing the pattern.

ABBY: Maybe I should take it off.

PATRICK: No! I mean- that's our ring. That's our-you can't take it off. Be proud.

ABBY: This is never going to work.

PATRICK: You know some people actually find me likeable.

ABBY: I'm sure that's true. But they won't. You don't know them.

PATRICK: Well, I'd like to. That's what tonight is all about, isn't it? Just give me a chance. I'll be on extra good behavior and they're bound to-

ABBY: This isn't about you. There's nothing you-

PATRICK: Well, let me try. I charmed you didn't I? (He tries to put his arms around her and pull her in for a kiss.)

ABBY: Not now.

PATRICK: Sweetheart-

ABBY: Ground rules.

PATRICK: Ground rules?

ABBY: Yes, ground rules. Say as little as possible. Don't bring up a subject unless I've already brought it up, especially if it pertains to us. Don't-

PATRICK: Wait a sec. I never agreed to follow any kind of rules. What is this? Next you're going to tell me not to speak until spoken to?

ABBY: I'm just setting up some-

PATRICK: What is this? Catholic grammar school? Where's your ruler, Sister Abigail?

ABBY: This is not the time for joking. Listen to me. We are about to enter a war zone and we need a strategy.

PATRICK: Lighten up. You always expect the worst.

ABBY: They are the worst.

PATRICK: They're your kids.

ABBY: I know them. You don't. And this is never going to work out. I never should have -

PATRICK: No. You need this. We need this.

ABBY: Maybe I can still call and cancel.

PATRICK: No.

ABBY: I'll just say I am not feeling well and-

PATRICK: No. That would be lying and you-

ABBY: I am not feeling well.

PATRICK: You'll be fine.

ABBY: Does the house look okay?

PATRICK: Perfect.

ABBY: Do I look okay?

PATRICK: Perfect.

ABBY: Stop it. Don't lie.

PATRICK: I never do.

ABBY: Just wait. You'll see that-

PATRICK: Are they all arriving together?

ABBY: I think so.

PATRICK: Great. We'll-

ABBY: This isn't going to work.

PATRICK: I'm sure they want you to be happy.

ABBY: Don't be so-

PATRICK: With me, you're happy.

ABBY: Yes.

PATRICK: They'll see that.

ABBY: No, they won't.

PATRICK: Give them time. They will.

ABBY: It's been six years since all four of us have been together in this house.

PATRICK: Yes, you mentioned-

ABBY: I saw my youngest at her graduation a few years back and once after that at the-

PATRICK: Everything will be fine.

ABBY: My middle one, she moved out to California and rarely comes to-

PATRICK: I know.

ABBY: What do you mean you know-

PATRICK: You told me.

ABBY: Shouldn't you check on dinner?

PATRICK: I just-

ABBY: Check again.

PATRICK: I don't-

ABBY: I don't want anything to be ruined. I want it all to-

PATRICK: I'm not going to ruin dinner. I have it all under control.

ABBY: Please go check.

PATRICK: Fine.

(PATRICK crosses to the kitchen. ABBY follows him talking.)

ABBY: I wish I wouldn't have ruined the cookies.

PATRICK: It's-

ABBY: They love cookies. All of them do.

(The doorbell rings.)

ABBY: Oh, my-

(PATRICK takes ABBY by the waist and begins to cross to the door.)

PATRICK: Here we go. Everything will be-

ABBY: No. I think it'd be best if you stayed in the kitchen until I-

PATRICK: What? We are going to answer the door together-

ABBY: I don't think-

PATRICK: Like the happy couple that we are.

ABBY: Just go check on dinner and stay there until I get you. Please.

PATRICK: I don't think-

(The doorbell rings again.)

ABBY: Come on. They're waiting.

PATRICK: I want to-

ABBY: Please do this one thing for me.

PATRICK: Fine.

ABBY: Thanks.

PATRICK: Good luck. (PATRICK exits into the kitchen.)

ABBY: I need more than luck.

(ABBY takes a deep breath, composes herself and crosses to the front door. She opens it. WHITNEY, a slightly pudgy woman in her early thirties with dark features and troubled eyes, RENA, a spunky woman in her late twenties, with spiky bright red hair and stylish, yet imaginative clothing, and ANNA, a slender, delicate-looking girl in her early twenties, stand at the door. Each is dressed for winter and carries a wrapped Christmas present.)

WHITNEY: Happy holidays!

ABBY: Hi! Come on in!

RENA: Thanks!

ANNA: Merry Christmas Eve!

ABBY: Same to you, sweetheart. (She gives ANNA a quick kiss on the cheek and then turns to see RENA) Rena, what happened to your hair?

WHITNEY: What kind of greeting is that?

ABBY: I'm sorry, but I wasn't expecting-

RENA: I always wanted to be a redhead. Now I am.

ABBY: The Lord gave you the most beautiful chestnut hair and now you-

RENA: It was brown. It was dull. Now it's-

ABBY: Is it permanent? Tell me it was just a temporary wash.

RENA: It's permanent.

ABBY: Rena, no one has hair that color!

RENA: I do.

ABBY: Don't you think you're getting a little too old to-

WHITNEY: Hey! Remember us? Your other kids. Can we talk about something other than Rena's hair?

ABBY: Yes, sorry. I just wasn't expecting-

WHITNEY: Well, it's been a long time.

ABBY: Yes it has. Too long. Its good to finally have all my girls home.

ANNA: It's good to be home.

ABBY: Oh, Anna, you look- (Anna is pronounced so it rhymes with "banana")

RENA: It's Awna now. (Awna is pronounced so that it rhymes with "Donna".)

ABBY: What?

WHITNEY: She goes by Awna now. Where have you been?

ABBY: Since when?

WHITNEY: Since last year.

ABBY: But I named you Anna.

WHITNEY: Well, it's Awna, now.

ABBY: But you were named after my baby sister who was stillborn. You remember me telling-

WHITNEY: You shouldn't name people after dead people. It's morbid.

ABBY: It was meant to honor-

WHITNEY: It's morbid.

ABBY: (To ANNA) Do you feel that way too?

ANNA: Yes.

ABBY: Have you always felt-

ANNA: Yes.

ABBY: Is that why you-

ANNA: No.

ABBY: Then why-

WHITNEY: She likes it better that way.

ABBY: Let her speak for herself. Anna?

RENA: It's Awna.

ANNA: I like it better that way.

ABBY: Why?

WHITNEY: It's more artistic.

ABBY: Anna?

RENA: Awna.

ANNA: It's more artistic.

RENA: She's trying to be an artist, you know. Did you know-

ABBY: Yes, of course.

RENA: Well, I figured-

ABBY: Who do you think paid for all those art lessons when she was-

WHITNEY and RENA: Dad.

ABBY: Girls, your father was d- had passed on before-

WHITNEY: It was Dad's life insurance money that-

RENA: And his savings-

ABBY: I had to work to support-

RENA: Don't act like a martyr. You only worked part-time most-

ABBY: I was busy raising three-

RENA: And what a lovely job you did!

ANNA: So where's-

ABBY: In the kitchen.

RENA: Doing what?

ABBY: Cooking.

RENA: Oh.

ABBY: Yes. He's cooking the meal tonight.

WHITNEY: You used to always-

ABBY: I know. I should have-

ANNA: No, its fine.

ABBY: Are you sure?

ANNA: Yes.

RENA: Is he a good cook?

ABBY: Well, I think so.

RENA: Well, great then.

WHITNEY: It's good to see you, Mom.

ABBY: You, too.

WHITNEY: Can we sit down?

ABBY: Oh, yes. Yes, of course. This is your home. Make yourself at home.

WHITNEY: Thanks.

ABBY: Let me take your coats. Where are my manners?

RENA: Thanks.

(ABBY gathers up the girls' coats and takes them to a hall closet.)

WHITNEY: House looks good.

RENA: (Picking up a couple frog stuffed animals) These are new.

ABBY: Yes, well people just keep giving them to me.

ANNA: I'll put your presents under the tree, okay?

(ANNA crosses and puts the presents under the Christmas tree.)

ABBY: Sure, but you really shouldn't have.

WHITNEY: You knew we would.

RENA: So when do we get to meet your new man?

ABBY: Well, like I said, he's cooking.

RENA: I know, but-

ABBY: I told him to wait in there. I-

WHITNEY: Why would you-

ABBY: I thought maybe we should first, we-just the four of us-

ANNA: Like old times.

ABBY: Did I make the wrong decision? I could-

ANNA: No, it's fine.

ABBY: Should I go get-

WHITNEY: No, it's okay.

RENA: Where did you meet?

ABBY: I'm sorry-

RENA: Where did you meet what's-his-name?

WHITNEY: Raymond, right?

ABBY: Patrick.

WHITNEY: That's right. Patrick. I was close.

RENA: So where did you and Patrick meet?

ABBY: Oh, we-

RENA: You didn't mention that when you-

ABBY: Well, no. I didn't-

RENA: So, what's the story?

ABBY: Well, it's really not that noteworthy. I don't think-

RENA: Of course it is.

ANNA: We'd love to hear it.

ABBY: Well, if you really-

RENA: Yes. We do.

ABBY: Well, um, we met at the, um, grocery-

RENA: Really?

ABBY: Frozen food section.

RENA: Oh.

WHITNEY: How cliché.

ANNA: You met-

ABBY: It's a long story. How's your daughter?

WHITNEY: Mine?

RENA: Well, you're the only one with-

WHITNEY: Dorothy's fine.

ABBY: She's now, what-

WHITNEY: Two and three months.

ANNA: She's precious.

ABBY: Where is she?

WHITNEY: With Angie.

ABBY: Who's Angie?

RENA: Her best friend.

ABBY: Dorothy's best-

WHITNEY: No, mine.

ABBY: I wish you would have-

WHITNEY: I didn't think that was a good-

ABBY: Why wouldn't it be-

WHITNEY: Please, don't-

ABBY: I'd like to finally meet my only granddaughter.

WHITNEY: I was afraid this evening might get messy.

ABBY: Messy?

WHITNEY: If the topic of the letters happened to come up-

RENA: I wouldn't mind discussing-

WHITNEY: I just didn't want my daughter to see us fighting.

ABBY: We aren't going to-

ANNA: So when is-

ABBY: Well, did you at least bring a picture of-

WHITNEY: No.

ABBY: I'd really love to-

WHITNEY: Well, I don't have one with-

ABBY: What kind of mother doesn't keep a picture-

WHITNEY: Excuse me. What kind of-

RENA: Where are all your pictures of us, Mother? All I see is frogs.

ANNA: So when do you think dinner might be-

ABBY: Dinner! Yes. I'll just go get-

ANNA: Great!

RENA: And we can meet-

ABBY: Yes. I'll be right-

RENA: Sure.

(ABBY exits.)

WHITNEY: Well, what do you think?

RENA: Did you see the look on her face when you brought up the letters?

WHITNEY: Yes.

ANNA: I don't think we should-

RENA: I bet that's why we're here!

ANNA: Now, don't jump to-

RENA: Why else would she get us all together-

ANNA: I just don't think we should assume-

RENA: I'm going to ask her.

WHITNEY: Don't just ask her. She might just say they don't exist. But if she acts guilty tonight, then we'll know-

ANNA: Please. Can't we just have a pleasant evening?

RENA: Don't you want your letter?

ANNA: Of course. But I just don't think we-

WHITNEY: Let's wait for her to make the first move.

RENA: Maybe the letters are our Christmas presents.

WHITNEY: Maybe.

ANNA: I just don't think-

(ABBY and PATRICK enter.)

ABBY: Girls, this is Patrick.

PATRICK: Hello!

RENA: Hi!

ABBY: Babies first. This is Anna.

WHITNEY and RENNA: Awna!

ABBY: Sorry. Anyway, she's the baby of the family.

ANNA: Hi.

ABBY: And this is Rena.

RENA: The infamous middle child.

ABBY: Her hair didn't look like that last time I saw her.

WHITNEY: Mom-

PATRICK: Hello.

RENA: Hey.

ABBY: And this is Whitney.

PATRICK: Hi.

WHITNEY: Hello.

ABBY: She's my oldest.

PATRICK: Nice to meet you all.

RENA: You too.

PATRICK: Your mother's said such nice things about-

WHITNEY: I'm sure she has.

RENA: But she hasn't told us much about you.

PATRICK: Oh, well, I-

ABBY: I haven't had a chance, but now we can all get to know-

PATRICK: I imagine you girls have a lot to catch up on.

ABBY: Oh, yes. We-

ANNA: It's been a long time.

ABBY: Yes.

PATRICK: Well, I'm glad to finally meet-

WHITNEY: So you're the fiancé.

ANNA: Don't be-

PATRICK: Yes and you're the daughters.

RENA: Yes, we are.

ABBY: Well, great. Let's all just-

RENA: So you look younger than her. Are you?

ANNA: I don't know if-

PATRICK: Yes.

RENA: So how much younger are you than her?

ANNA: That's a bit-

ABBY: Than she.

RENA: What?

ABBY: Younger than she. Not her.

WHITNEY: I don't see what that has to do with-

ABBY: My kids will use proper English!

WHITNEY: We're not kids anymore and we can-

ANNA: Please, don't-

RENA: I was just trying to ask a question.

WHITNEY: And then she-

RENA: Which has yet to be answered.

ABBY: What was the question?

WHITNEY: You never listen to us!

ABBY: Don't start with-

ANNA: Please. Let's not-

PATRICK: I am eight years younger than your mother.

RENA: Oh.

PATRICK: And we are very much in love.

ABBY: Honey, I don't think that-

WHITNEY: She though she loved my father too.

PATRICK: I'm sure she did.

WHITNEY: I wouldn't be so sure.

ANNA: So how long have you been seeing each other?

ABBY: Well, you know, we've-

PATRICK: Three months.

WHITNEY: You've only been-

RENA: Wow!

ABBY: I think it's been a little longer than-

PATRICK: Well, three months and four days...

ANNA: You know the exact date?

PATRICK: Yes.

ANNA: How cute!

RENA: And you've been engaged how long?

PATRICK: Two weeks and five days.

RENA: Set a date yet?

ABBY: No, but-

RENA: So, how'd you pop the question?

PATRICK: Well, I took her to a park and-

ABBY: It was really romantic.

PATRICK: I told her to get something out of the trunk.

RENA: The trunk?

PATRICK: Of the car.

RENA: Oh.

PATRICK: And when she opened the trunk-

ABBY: A bunch of helium balloons came flying out and-

ANNA: Oh!

PATRICK: And when she turned around-She had the most surprised look on her face-

ANNA: I bet!

PATRICK: Well, when she turned around I was down on one knee with the ring and all-

ANNA: That is the sweetest thing I've ever heard!

ABBY: It was really nice.

RENA: That's terrible for the environment, you know.

PATRICK: Huh?

RENA: Releasing helium balloons into the atmosphere. It is very bad for-

ABBY: Oh, come on-

PATRICK: It was for a very special occasion. I think that it warrants-

RENA: A bunch of birds and cows and stuff dying violent and painful deaths so that you can have a few moments of romance.

ANNA: I think it was a very romantic story.

RENA: Yea, if you find birds with mutilated digestive tracts romantic.

PATRICK: I think you're missing the point of-

ABBY: Can we please move on to some other topic?

WHITNEY: Yes. Please. This is too gross.

RENA: Mutilated birds or our mother being romantically involved with this guy?

WHITNEY: Both.

PATRICK: Okay. That was entirely unnecessary. I don't think-

ABBY: Patrick, it's okay.

RENA: We were just joking around.

PATRICK: I don't think it was-

ABBY: Can we please move on in the conversation?

RENA: Fine. How did you two lovebirds meet?

WHITNEY: Can you move past the bird references?

RENA: I'm trying.

PATRICK: Well, we met-

ABBY: Now girls, I've already told you that story.

RENA: I wanted to hear his telling of it.

ABBY: I don't see why. We have so much to catch up on. Why waste time telling the same story-

RENA: Yours wasn't very eventful.

ABBY: There was nothing wrong with-

RENA: I think it's interesting how stories and facts change depending on how many times the story has been told and who's telling it.

WHITNEY: Yea, so how did you meet?

ABBY: (Picking up the frog-shaped candy dish) Anyone want some candy?

PATRICK: No, thank-you.

RENA: I'm good.

WHITNEY: I'll take some. Thanks.

RENA: So, you were saying-

PATRICK: I was saying-

RENA: How you two met.

PATRICK: Yes, well, we-

(ABBY shrugs in frustration and stands up and crosses out of sight of the girls on the couch. She begins to pantomime pushing a shopping cart.)

PATRICK: What are you-

(The three daughters turn to look at ABBY. She freezes.)

RENA: I asked, how did you meet?

PATRICK: AOL chat room.

RENA: Really?

WHITNEY: I can't believe-

ABBY: He's just kidding.

WHITNEY: You lied to us.

ABBY: I didn't-

WHITNEY: We've been here less than ten minutes and already, you've begun to lie to us.

PATRICK: I'm sure, she was just embarrassed to-

WHITNEY: Like, you always lie to us.

ABBY: I do not.

ANNA: Can we please, just-

PATRICK: I mean, I guess, its kind of embarrassing to meet on the Internet, but I'm just glad to have met her and-

WHITNEY: How many other guys have you met online?

ABBY: None. I wasn't planning on-

PATRICK: It was fate.

RENA: I don't believe in fate.

PATRICK: You don't-

RENA: No.

PATRICK: How-

WHITNEY: Don't get her started.

RENA: I believe in-

WHITNEY: So what ever happened to what's his name?

ABBY: Who?

WHITNEY: That guy that you were seeing before-

RENA: What was that last guy's name?

(ABBY begins to squirm. She needs to use the bathroom, but doesn't want to leave the conversation.)

WHITNEY: Herman?

RENA: Something like-

WHITNEY: Herbert?

RENA: No, more common than-

ABBY: Who are you talking-

WHITNEY: It sounded like Herbert.

ANNA: I never met him.

RENA: None of us did.

WHITNEY: Started with an "H"-

RENA: Yea. It was-

ABBY: I don't know-

WHITNEY: Henry. That was it. The doctor-

RENA: Yea, Henry.

ABBY: You mean Jonathan?

RENA: Yea, Jonathan. That's him.

WHITNEY: I was close.

RENA: Yes. You were.

PATRICK: How is Henry close to Jonathan?

WHITNEY: He was a gynecologist.

ABBY: No, a pediatrician.

WHITNEY: That's right. That's what I thought.

RENA: Anyway, he didn't last long.

ABBY: I don't see why we need to talk about Jonathan.

PATRICK: I'm not interested in-

WHITNEY: Just making a point about the longevity of-

PATRICK: I don't care about-

WHITNEY: So have you been married before, Nathan?

ABBY: It's Patrick.

WHITNEY: Oh, that's right. Sorry.

RENA: So have you been?

PATRICK: Married before?

RENA: Yes.

PATRICK: Yes.

RENA: Widowed?

PATRICK: Divorced.

RENA: Oh.

ABBY: We really don't need to discuss-

WHITNEY: Do you have any children?

PATRICK: No.

RENA: Why not?

ABBY: Rena, that's-

PATRICK: Well, we-

RENA: Are you impotent?

ABBY: Rena! How dare you-

ANNA: Rena, please!

WHITNEY: I can't believe you just-

PATRICK: I-

RENA: What? Enquiring minds what to know!

WHITNEY: That was shocking, even for you.

RENA: Well, are you?

PATRICK: No, I'm-

RENA: It's nothing to be ashamed of. My boss is.

WHITNEY: How do you-

RENA: Don't ask.

PATRICK: No, I am not.

RENA: Then why don't you have-

ABBY: That's really not your-

PATRICK: My wife-my ex-wife- and I were just very-career oriented people and we didn't-

WHITNEY: What's your career?

PATRICK: I'm a computer programmer.

WHITNEY: Oh.

RENA: What was her career?

PATRICK: Who?

RENA: Your ex-wife?

ABBY: I don't see why we need to talk about-

PATRICK: She's into real estate.

WHITNEY: Oh.

ABBY: Let's talk about-

RENA: Why'd you get a divorce?

ABBY: That really isn't-

PATRICK: She wasn't truthful about some things.

RENA: Like what?

ABBY: That's private. Will you-

ANNA: So what are we having for dinner?

ABBY: Well, Patrick fixed all sorts of-

PATRICK: Ham, sweet

RENA: Great! Dead pig!

WHITNEY: Just ignore her.

PATRICK: Sweet potato soufflé-

WHITNEY: I hate sweet potatoes.

PATRICK: Homemade bread, baked beans-

ANNA: Sounds great!

PATRICK: What else am I forgetting?

ABBY: That casserole thing in the oven.

PATRICK: Yes, broccoli and cheese casserole.

ABBY: It's really good.

PATRICK: And noodles. My great grandma's recipe.

ANNA: That's nice.

PATRICK: And for dessert, lemon meringue pie made from scratch. An old family secret. Guaranteed to be the best pie you'll ever-

RENA: Well I-

ANNA: I love pie.

ABBY: There were cookies, but I-

PATRICK: Now honey that's-

RENA: Shouldn't you be in the kitchen or something?

ANNA: Rena-

PATRICK: No. I've got it all under control.

ABBY: Just make sure nothing burns.

PATRICK: I know, dear.

WHITNEY: That's a lot of food.

PATRICK: Well, I-

RENA: We're girls. We don't eat that much!

WHITNEY: Speak for yourself.

ABBY: Patrick, shouldn't you check on-

PATRICK: I told you. It's under control.

ABBY: (Giving him a look) I really think you should check it again, dear.

PATRICK: Dear, I told you it's-

ABBY: (The look narrowing) Patrick.

PATRICK: I'm sorry ladies, but I guess I need to go check on dinner-

ABBY: Thank-you.

PATRICK: If you'll excuse me. (PATRICK exits to the kitchen.)

ABBY: (Starting to head in the direction of the hallway leading to the bathroom)
Well, I'm just -

WHITNEY: Just a question.

ABBY: Yes.

WHITNEY: Did you purposely set out to find a guy that we would completely despise?

ABBY: I don't think you should-

WHITNEY: Because you sure succeeded.

(ABBY's squirming intensifies even more.)

RENA: Yep!

ABBY: I don't see how you can-

WHITNEY: He's such a cliché.

RENA: You really want to marry this guy?

ABBY: Yes, of course.

RENA: Why?

ABBY: You haven't even had a chance to-

ANNA: I think he seems nice.

ABBY: Thank-you Anna. I'm glad some-

RENA: It's Awna.

ABBY: Sorry, I'm not used to-

ANNA: It's fine.

WHITNEY: No, it's not fine. She wants to be called Awna.

ABBY: I'm trying to-

(PATRICK reenters.)

PATRICK: Well, everything seems to be in order.

ABBY: Great.

WHITNEY: Can't wait.

PATRICK: So, what'd I miss?

RENA: We were just telling our mother that we didn't think she should marry you.

ANNA: Rena!

ABBY: That really isn't-

PATRICK: Well, you get straight to the point, don't you?

RENA: You wanted to know what you missed.

PATRICK: Well, I admire your brutal honesty. It's a good trait to have. Wish more people would-

WHITNEY: Don't patronize her.

ABBY: He wasn't.

PATRICK: Tell, you what? How about you take a little time to get to know me and then you can more fairly make such a judgment call.

RENA: I believe in first impressions.

PATRICK: You believe in first impressions, but not fate. Interesting.

WHITNEY: Don't analyze her.

ABBY: He's not.

PATRICK: Just an observation.

WHITNEY: She doesn't need your-

PATRICK: I think you'll find that I'm a nice guy.

RENA: I doubt it.

PATRICK: We'll see.

WHITNEY: Well, I-

PATRICK: And if you find that you still don't want your mother and I to get married-

RENA: We don't-

PATRICK: Then I guess you'll have to deal with it because I'm marrying her, not you, and so it really isn't-

WHITNEY: It's surprising that you haven't considered marrying one of us.

ABBY: What are you-

WHITNEY: We're closer to your age.

PATRICK: No, I'm not. Your mother and I are only eight-

RENA: We can do the math. She was just kidding.

WHITNEY: And it was really funny.

PATRICK: I don't see how-

RENA: Yep. It was.

ABBY: They have an unusual sense of humor. Always have.

PATRICK: That's one way to put it.

(ANNA notices ABBY's extreme squirming and the sickening expression on her face as her discomfort begins to turn to pain.)

ANNA: What's wrong?

ABBY: Nothing. I just-

PATRICK: Honey, are you-

ABBY: I'm fine.

RENA: You don't look fine.

ABBY: I'm-

WHITNEY: You need to pee, don't you?

ABBY: I just-

WHITNEY: She needs to use the bathroom.

RENA: Is that all?

PATRICK: Honey, do you need to-

ABBY: Yes.

PATRICK: Then why don't you-

WHITNEY: Because she's scared to leave you alone with us.

ABBY: It's not that. It's just-

RENA: We'll be fine.

ABBY: I just didn't want to be an ungracious hostess and-

PATRICK: Honey, go to the bathroom. This is silly.

ANNA: Please, just-

RENA: Come on. He can handle us.

PATRICK: Yes, I can-

WHITNEY: We'll be good.

RENA: We will?

PATRICK: Honey, just go.

ABBY: Okay. (ABBY stands and rushes down the hall to the bathroom door.)

(There is a brief awkward silence after ABBY exits. Patrick eyes the girls. He begins to twiddle his thumbs.)

RENA: What are you doing?

PATRICK: I'm sorry?

RENA: You're twiddling your thumbs!

PATRICK: Well, I guess-

RENA: Wow! I have never met anyone who actually twiddles their thumbs!

PATRICK: I don't see why-

WHITNEY: How cliché.

RENA: I never realized people actually do that.

PATRICK: Well, I do.

RENA: I always thought that was just an expression.

PATRICK: Well, I guess it isn't because I do.

(A silence falls over the group. WHITNEY and RENA make a silent pact to not initiate the conversation. They smile at each other, as PATRICK searches for a topic of conversation.)

PATRICK: So, what do you girls do?

RENA: What do we do?

PATRICK: For a living.

RENA: What a generic conversation starter!

WHITNEY: Cliché.

PATRICK: I was just trying to-

RENA: Why do people always have to base their perceptions of people based-

WHITNEY: Come on Rena, drop it. Let's just tell him what we do.

RENA: Fine. Babies first.

WHITNEY: Yes. Well, Awna is a struggling artist.

RENA: Which means she works in the nightgown department-

ANNA: Sleepwear.

RENA: At J.C. Penny's.

WHITNEY: And works part time as a guide at the art museum.

RENA: And has a tiny apartment full of beautiful paintings-

WHITNEY: Originals, all of which are for sale, if you're interested.

PATRICK: Well, I might have to-

RENA: My turn?

PATRICK: Sure.

RENA: I'm a drug dealer in LA.

PATRICK: I beg your pardon?

RENA: I pretty much deal whatever's hot at the time. Do a lot of deals in cocaine. Try to keep a good stock of marijuana for the kiddies, that kind of thing.

PATRICK: That's revolting!

RENA: Yea, and it'd be even more revolting if I was serious.

PATRICK: So, you don't actually sell drugs?

RENA: You catch on quick.

PATRICK: You said you- how was I to-

RENA: It's a joke we've had going for years.

WHITNEY: People would ask her what she wanted to be when she grew up and she'd say a drug dealer.

RENA: It was riot at family reunions.

WHITNEY: Nearly gave our grandpa a heart attack.

PATRICK: I don't think it's very funny.

RENA: Well, maybe you should-

ANNA: Rena, why don't you tell him what you really do?

RENA: Fine. I'm a journalist.

PATRICK: Well, that accounts for the obsession with lying.

RENA: What is that suppose to-

PATRICK: Never mind. I meant to say that-

RENA: Do you have a problem with journalists?

PATRICK: No. No. I think it must be exciting to be a journalist.

WHITNEY: No, its not.

RENA: Hey!

ANNA: Be nice.

WHITNEY: Well, I'm sorry, but-

RENA: Fine. I write for the foods section. Far from glamorous-

PATRICK: Well, that sounds-

RENA: Not exactly what I had in mind when I went into journalism.

PATRICK: Going to restaurants, eating for free, and then giving your critique. I wouldn't mind having that-

RENA: No, that's somebody else's job.

PATRICK: Oh. Then what do you-

RENA: I write "interest articles".

PATRICK: Oh, well that's-

RENA: Like, why the cranberry is the fruit to watch out for this winter. That kind of-

PATRICK: Well, that sounds interesting.

RENA: No, it isn't. Whitney, its your turn.

WHITNEY: Well, I'm a sales rep for Proctor and Gamble.

PATRICK: That's nice.

WHITNEY: I like it.

PATRICK: Well, that's-

WHITNEY: Just wish I had more time off to spend with my daughter. I travel a lot.

PATRICK: Yea. That can be rough. And what does your husband do?

WHITNEY: I'm not married.

PATRICK: Oh, I'm sorry.

WHITNEY: I'm not.

PATRICK: I didn't-

RENA: She really hasn't told you much about us has she?

PATRICK: Well, she talks about you girls a lot, but-

WHITNEY: I'm sure she does-

PATRICK: But she's usually pretty vague.

RENA: Has she told you about the letters?

PATRICK: The letters?

WHITNEY: Come on. You know-

RENA: The letters.

WHITNEY: From our dad.

PATRICK: No, I can't say she has-

RENA: Don't lie to us!

PATRICK: I don't lie.

WHITNEY: Everybody lies at some point.

RENA: Yea, what makes you so special?

PATRICK: I cannot tell a lie. I just-

WHITNEY: Yea, you and Abraham Lincoln.

PATRICK: I think you mean George Wash-

WHITNEY: I mean Abraham Lincoln.

PATRICK: But it was George-

WHITNEY: I know what I meant.

PATRICK: I was just-

RENA: He was called Honest Abe.

PATRICK: Yes, but-

WHITNEY: See, I told you I-

ANNA: So when are we-

RENA: So, you're telling us that you never-

PATRICK: I just don't lie. I believe-

RENA: Well, you know what they say. Opposites attract!

PATRICK: What do you mean by-

RENA: Well, your fiancé doesn't exactly have the best track record when it comes to honesty.

PATRICK: Abby has never lied to me.

WHITNEY: Just wait.

ANNA: So, do we look how you imagined we would?

PATRICK: What?

ANNA: Do we look like you thought we would? In your mind, you-

PATRICK: Yes, pretty much.

WHITNEY: Now, I know you're-

PATRICK: Except the red hair.

RENA: Hey!

PATRICK: What?! I like it!

ANNA: We look like you thought we would? Really? That's-

PATRICK: Well, she showed me a picture.

ANNA: Oh.

RENA: Just one picture?

PATRICK: Yea.

WHITNEY: She probably only has one.

RENA: Probably.

WHITNEY: Which one was it?

PATRICK: Well, I guess it was Halloween because you were all dressed like witches.

WHITNEY: How appropriate!

RENA: No, we dress like that all the time.

ANNA: She's just kidding.

PATRICK: I figured as much.

RENA: I don't know. You bought the crack story pretty easily.

PATRICK: Now, I-

WHITNEY: Yea, you did.

PATRICK: I'm sorry, but I expect people to be honest. I don't-

WHITNEY: Awful self-righteous, aren't you?

RENA: It was a joke. Don't you know what a-

ANNA: So, she still has the witch picture?

PATRICK: Yes.

ANNA: That was a great Halloween party, wasn't it?

WHITNEY: Yea, it was. I was the sexy witch. (To ANNA) And you were the whimsical, cutesy witch and-

RENA: And I was the ugly hag witch.

WHITNEY: Well, that's what you wanted to be.

RENA: I know. I'm not complaining.

WHITNEY: What a night!

RENA: Whose party was that, anyway?

WHITNEY: Rebecca something.

RENA: Doesn't ring a bell.

WHITNEY: Rebecca Green, maybe, or Rebecca Brown. I think it was a color.

ANNA: Betsy Krimble's.

WHITNEY: Yes, that's right. I was close.

RENA: Betsy. She was the one with the three-legged dog.

ANNA: Clover. That was his name.

RENA: Yep.

PATRICK: I wonder what is taking her so long.

RENA: She's probably throwing up.

ANNA: Rena!

RENA: Well, she probably is.

WHITNEY: That's what she does when she gets nervous. Always has.

RENA: And she sure has been nervous tonight.

PATRICK: Well, she just wanted everything to be perfect for you girls and-

RENA: We know why she's so nervous.

PATRICK: She was really-

RENA: The letters. She's going to give us the letters and-

ANNA: You don't know that.

PATRICK: I really don't know about any letters. But I do know that she-

RENA: She might have not told him.

ANNA: I just don't think we should assume-

PATRICK: She just really wanted to make tonight special you. She really misses you. She wishes you would get together more-

WHITNEY: Look, don't act like you even begin to understand our family situation because-

PATRICK: I'm just saying that-

WHITNEY: You're just her latest fling. That doesn't-

PATRICK: Your mother and I are in love.

WHITNEY: That doesn't make you part of this family.

PATRICK: I think I need to check on dinner.

ANNA: Do you need any help?

PATRICK: No. I'm fine. (PATRICK exits into the kitchen.)

ANNA: Whitney, that really wasn't-

WHITNEY: Oh, come on. I'm just having fun with the guy.

ANNA: He didn't look like he was having fun.

RENA: They met on the Internet! Can you imagine her trying to pickup guys in a chat room?

WHITNEY: I'd rather not.

RENA: I bet she lied about her age.

WHITNEY: Of course. She always does.

ANNA: Most women lie about-

RENA: I don't.

WHITNEY: I don't think that counts.

RENA: Why not?

WHITNEY: You're twenty-eight. Wait til you hit thirty and then you'll-

RENA: I doubt I will.

WHITNEY: You doubt you'll hit thirty?

RENA: No, I doubt I'll lie about my age when I do.

WHITNEY: We'll see.

RENA: What are we talking about anyway?

WHITNEY: I'm not sure.

RENA: We should be figuring out a strategy to get her to give us the letters.

ANNA: We don't need a strategy. This isn't-

RENA: This is war. This is a battle. We need to-

ANNA: Don't be silly.

RENA: Oh, come on. You know that's why we're here.

ANNA: No. I came here to see her.

RENA: Well, you always were the favorite.

ANNA: I am not.

WHITNEY: Actually, yes you are.

ANNA: I'm-

WHITNEY: But it's okay. You're our favorite too.

RENA: Yep.

ANNA: Well, thanks, but I-

RENA: We're digressing again.

WHITNEY: I'm not sure if what we really need is a plan. If it's meant to happen, it will happen.

RENA: Of course, it's meant to happen, Whitney. What is that supposed to-

WHITNEY: I just mean, if Dad wrote us-

RENA: What do you mean *if*-

WHITNEY: I meant if Dad wants us to have-

RENA: Why wouldn't Dad want us to-

WHITNEY: Hey, don't attack me. I'm on your side.

RENA: Sorry, I just-

WHITNEY: It's okay.

RENA: Do you think she really didn't tell him?

WHITNEY: Probably not. They haven't known each other very long.

RENA: I know.

ANNA: Let's be nice to him, please.

RENA: Why would-

ANNA: He seems like a nice guy.

WHITNEY: He seems like a self-righteous, arrogant, pompous, pious ass.

RENA: Tell us how you really feel.

ANNA: Please. She really likes him.

WHITNEY: No. She doesn't. He's just some rich good-looking younger guy.

RENA: I wonder why he's with her.

WHITNEY: Maybe she's good in bed.

RENA: (Screaming with laughter and squeals.) Eeeewww! Didn't need that mental picture! Thank-you!

WHITNEY: Wow! We finally found something that grosses out Rena.

RENA: Yes, you did.

WHITNEY: It's about time.

ANNA: Just try to be nice tonight, okay?

WHITNEY: Okay, anything for you sweetie.

RENA: But it won't be easy.

WHITNEY: But we'll try.

ANNA: If you're nice to them, maybe there is more of a chance that she'll give you your letter.

RENA: Oh, so you're finally admitting that she has them?

WHITNEY: No. She's just trying to convince you to behave.

RENA: Is this true Awna?

ANNA: My sister knows me well.

(PATRICK reenters.)

PATRICK: Well, everything is still in order for dinner.

ANNA: Great!

PATRICK: She's still in the bathroom?

RENA: Yep.

WHITNEY: She may never come out.

PATRICK: Maybe I should go check on her.

RENA: Let the woman puke in peace.

ANNA: Rena please-

WHITNEY: Look at this way. She's making more room for your lovely dinner.

ANNA: Whitney-

PATRICK: Maybe, I should-

RENA: So why is dinner taking so long?

PATRICK: Your mother wanted us to have plenty of time to catch up before we-

WHITNEY: Because we're so much fun in conversation.

PATRICK: So, I made everything before you got here and I've been slowly simmering it until-

RENA: Oh, okay. Just wondering.

PATRICK: Are you hungry? I can make a cheese plate or something.

ANNA: No, we're fine. Thanks.

PATRICK: I'm sorry. I haven't even offered you something to drink. Would you like-

ANNA: No, we're fine.

WHITNEY: You don't want to see us drunk.

RENA: We get mean when we're drunk.

(ANNA clears her throat.)

WHITNEY: Look, we're sorry if we came off a little harsh earlier. It's just a tense time for all of us.

PATRICK: Oh, well thanks. I-

RENA: But, I still don't think she should marry you.

ANNA: Rena-

RENA: Sorry. Just being honest. He likes that quality in me.

PATRICK: Well, I'm sorry that we got off on the wrong foot. Why don't we try to get to know each other a little bit-

RENA: What kind of peanut butter do you use?

PATRICK: I beg your pardon.

RENA: What kind of peanut butter do you use?

PATRICK: I heard you the first time, but I don't see-

RENA: Just answer.

PATRICK: Why?

WHITNEY: Come on. Just play along.

PATRICK: Okay. Jiff.

RENA: No, kind, not brand. Reduced fat, creamy, right?

PATRICK: Actually, yes. How did you-

RENA: I'm good.

WHITNEY: Rena has this theory about people's personalities and their peanut butter preferences. It's silly.

RENA: Not, its not. It proves effective time and time again. Didn't I nail him?

PATRICK: What's your theory?

RENA: Well, you're reduced fat creamy. The sensible choice. Classic, but with a twist of modernism. And it's a little too good to be true. Doesn't quite taste like real peanut butter, a little too sugary sweet. But still enjoyable.

WHITNEY: I told you this was silly.

PATRICK: What are you?

WHITNEY: Goobers.

PATRICK: Huh?

WHITNEY: The stuff that comes with the peanut butter and the jelly all in one jar.

PATRICK: Oh.

RENA: The most economical choice. Conserves time and space and cuts straight to the point. There's order in those neatly processed rows of peanut butter and jelly. Yet this order can be disturbed with the slightest swipe of the spoon. This choice is limiting, yet creative.

WHITNEY: Do you know how many times I've had to hear this?

RENA: I don't-

WHITNEY: It's ridiculous.

PATRICK: What about you, Awna?

ANNA: Just regular creamy.

RENA: The simplest and most basic, but really the best. Perfect. Smooth and uncomplicated. Genuine. True. The way peanut butter was meant to be.

WHITNEY: She's like a horoscope writer. Those things are so vague, they can apply to anybody.

RENA: I'm telling you. My theory always works. Always. That should promote it to fact.

WHITNEY: It doesn't always work-

PATRICK: (To RENA) And what kind of peanut butter are you?

RENA: Extra crunchy!

WHITNEY: She likes to be different, to catch people off guard, give them something unexpected. Take the bumpy road in life.

RENA: She's heard me tell this before.

WHITNEY: Too many times. Oh yea, and a lot of people hate crunchy peanut butter. Won't touch it.

RENA: It is true.

PATRICK: What kind of peanut butter is your mother?

RENA: You don't know?

PATRICK: I can't recall.

RENA: You should find out. I think you would find the results startling.

PATRICK: What do you-

WHITNEY: She is such a drama queen!

RENA: I really should publish my findings.

WHITNEY: What findings?

RENA: I think I'll call it, "The Peanut Butter Personality Profile".

WHITNEY: How about "Observations from the Peanut Gallery"?

RENA: Maybe. That's not bad.

WHITNEY: Oh, come on. I was making fun of you, Rena.

RENA: You were?

WHITNEY: Yes.

RENA: Oh. Well, in that case, I guess, I'll stay with my first title.

WHITNEY: What's with you tonight? You're losing your edge.

RENA: I'm sorry. I'm just so preoccupied with this letter thing. I really think it's finally going to happen tonight.

ANNA: Don't assume that-

RENA: (To PATRICK) Are you sure she hasn't mentioned the letters to you?

PATRICK: No. Honestly. I have no idea what you are taking about.

RENA: Well, when our father was in the hospital and he knew that it-

WHITNEY: Should you be telling him this?

RENA: Yes.

PATRICK: I really don't need to-

RENA: When our father was in the hospital and he knew that he was nearing the end, he promised to write us each a letter that our mother would give us when he-

(ABBY enters.)

ABBY: Well, now. How's everybody doing?

PATRICK: Welcome back.

ABBY: Sorry I took so long.

ANNA: It's okay.

WHITNEY: How many times?

ABBY: How many times, what?

WHITNEY: How many times did you throw up?

ABBY: Well, I, uh-

ANNA: Whitney, please!

PATRICK: I really don't think that's an appropriate question!

WHITNEY: What! I'm just concerned is all.

ABBY: Can we please talk about something else?

ANNA: Yes.

RENA: When's dinner?

PATRICK: Soon. Pretty soon.

RENA: Good. I'm starved.

ABBY: Okay, great.

(A silence falls over them as they search for a topic of conversation.)

ABBY: So what did you talk about while I was-

RENA: Well, actually I was just explaining to your fiancé about the letters that Dad left-

ABBY: You shouldn't be telling him about that!

RENA: Why not? Are you ashamed?

ABBY: Of course not.

RENA: Well, you should be.

ABBY: I have nothing to be ashamed about.

RENA: That's not true.

PATRICK: Look, girls. We don't need to talk about-

RENA: So, you haven't told him anything about Dad's letters?

ABBY: Well, no.

RENA: Why not?

ABBY: Well, it just hadn't come up. I didn't see why-

RENA: Well, I'd think you'd tell the person that you plan on spending the rest of your life with about the thing that you're going to feel guilty about for the rest of your life.

ABBY: I don't feel guilty.

RENA: Well, you should.

ABBY: Rena, there are no letters.

RENA: Yes, there are.

ABBY: No, there aren't and you know that.

PATRICK: Would someone mind filling me in here?

WHITNEY: This is none of your-

ABBY: This doesn't involve you, dear.

PATRICK: I'd like to know-

RENA: Why don't we tell him?

WHITNEY: I don't see-

RENA: The ever-so honest man has the right to know what a liar he's about to marry.

ANNA: Rena, that isn't-

RENA: I think he should hear the whole story. Tell him, Mother.

ABBY: Well, I-

PATRICK: Sweetheart, you don't have to tell me anything that you-

ABBY: No, I'll tell you.

RENA: Go ahead.

ANNA: I really don't think this is-

WHITNEY: You can leave the room if you need to.

ANNA: I don't think, I-

RENA: (To ABBY) Tell him.

ABBY: Well, my husband was very ill and in the hospital for a long time and on a lot of painkillers. Sometimes he didn't always remember-

WHITNEY: Don't tell it like that.

RENA: Yea, like Dad was some kind of druggie. Like he was-

ABBY: I'm not trying to tell it like anything. Do you want to finish it for me? Be my guest.

RENA: No, go on.

ABBY: Well, anyway, after he died, Whitney and Rena told me that-

RENA: You left out-

ABBY: Just tell it yourself then.

RENA: I don't want to-

ABBY: I'm doing the best I can.

PATRICK: I'm sure this is hard on all of you. If you could just-

WHITNEY: Shut up and let her finish.

PATRICK: I was just-

RENA: Let her talk.

PATRICK: Fine.

ABBY: Apparently, he told the girls that he would write them each a letter that I was suppose to give to them when he passed away, but-

RENA: But what? Tell him what happened to our letters.

ABBY: Nothing happened to your letters. He never gave me-

RENA: That is not true! You still have them and won't let us-

WHITNEY: Or you lost them and you are too-

ABBY: He never gave me any letters. I'm sorry. But that's the truth.

RENA: Why would he tell us he was going to-

ABBY: Because he was very sick, sweetie. I am sure he meant to write them but he never got around to-

RENA: He promised us.

ABBY: Yes, but he didn't leave any letters. He didn't-

RENA: What? You're saying Dad was a liar?

ABBY: No, I'm not calling him a liar. I'm just saying he forgot.

ANNA: Dad wouldn't forget us.

ABBY: No, honey, that's not what I meant-

WHITNEY: You just said-

ABBY: He was really sick. He didn't always remember when-

RENA: No, what's sick is this situation.

ABBY: I don't see what-

RENA: You are deliberately keeping him from us because you know that we like him better than you.

ABBY: If he hadn't died, I'm sure you would've grown to hate him too.

ANNA: Mother!

WHITNEY: I can't believe you just-

RENA: What was that suppose to-

ABBY: Well, I'm sorry, but it's true. When someone's gone, it's a lot easier to remember all the good stuff and gloss over the bad.

WHITNEY: What are you-

ABBY: Your father wasn't perfect. He has a lot of problems.

RENA: Dad did not-

ABBY: Just like all of us do.

WHITNEY: I always knew you didn't love him-

ABBY: I did-

WHITNEY: But I never thought I'd hear you say it.

ABBY: I never said anything of the sort.

RENA: Yes, you did. You just said that-

PATRICK: She didn't say that-

WHITNEY: Stay out of this, Andrew.

PATRICK: It's Patrick and I think-

ABBY: I loved your father.

ANNA: Then why would you-

ABBY: I didn't mean it like-

ANNA: I think I need to go to the bathroom.

WHITNEY: Great! Now you made her need to throw up, too.

ANNA: I'm not going to-

ABBY: I didn't-

ANNA: I just need to freshen up. I-

RENA: I'll go with you.

ABBY: To the bathroom?

WHITNEY: Me too.

ABBY: You can use the one upstairs.

WHITNEY: No, I think we'd rather be together.

PATRICK: You're all going to-

RENA: Girls are notorious for going to the bathroom in groups.

WHITNEY: Come on. Let's go.

ABBY: Wash your hands. It's almost time for dinner.

RENA: Yea, I've been hearing that all night.

ABBY: When you get back, we'll eat, okay?

WHITNEY: Fine.

RENA: Whatever.

ANNA: I think I've lost my appetite.

ABBY: Look, Anna, I didn't-

RENA: It's Anna. Get it right.

ABBY: We'll sit down for a nice dinner and everything will be fine.

(WHITNEY exits down the hallway. RENA and ANNA follow her.)

ABBY: Patrick, I'm sorry you had to-

PATRICK: So let me get this straight. He told you that he would have letters for the kids and then-

ABBY: No. If he had, I would have reminded him or even written them myself.

PATRICK: You shouldn't say-

ABBY: No. He told Whitney and Rena. Maybe he told Anna too, but she was too young to remember it.

PATRICK: And then-

ABBY: And then after he died, they all came to me asking for their letters and it was the first I'd heard of it.

PATRICK: I believe you.

ABBY: I looked all through his stuff. Looked everywhere for weeks. There simply were no letters.

PATRICK: This must have been very hard-

ABBY: I've tried and tried to explain that to them, but they just won't believe me.

PATRICK: Sweetheart, why didn't you tell me about-

ABBY: It hadn't come up. I-It doesn't involve you.

PATRICK: Yes, it-

ABBY: No, it involves my family.

PATRICK: Soon I'm going to be part of your family, Abby. You need to-

ABBY: No. Not in some aspects. In some aspects you never will be –

PATRICK: I will-

ABBY: Consider yourself blessed.

PATRICK: Abby, you need to start treating me like- We shouldn't keep secrets from-

ABBY: Patrick, this isn't about you. I don't have the time to-

PATRICK: Well, make time.

ABBY: I'm going to go set the table.

(ABBY exits rapidly into the kitchen, just as RENA enters from the hallway.)

PATRICK: Hello.

RENA: Grabbing my purse. Smoke break.

PATRICK: Well -

RENA: She really hadn't told you about the letters, had she? You were telling the truth.

PATRICK: No, she never-

RENA: Well, now you know our deep dark secret. Welcome to the family, Patrick.

PATRICK: Rena, may I say something?

RENA: It's a free country. Sorta.

PATRICK: Well, I just don't understand what the big deal is.

RENA: Excuse me?

PATRICK: Well, it's just letters.

RENA: How dare you-

PATRICK: All I'm saying is-

RENA: I don't care what you-

PATRICK: I just don't think your father would want you to hold a grudge against your mother for twenty some years about some words that were or were not written on a piece of paper. That's all.

RENA: You didn't know my father.

PATRICK: Its sounds like you didn't either.

RENA: What's that suppose to-

PATRICK: If you honestly believe that a father would want his kids to be angry with his wife, the mother of his children, because of something as meager as a letter, then you-

RENA: My letter is not meager! It is-

PATRICK: It may be very sweet and nice to have, but in the end, its just words on paper of someone who died along time ago, when someone living is right in the next room and you're just turning your back on her.

RENA: I don't hate my mother.

PATRICK: Don't tell me. Tell her.

RENA: I just don't understand why she would keep our letters from us when-

PATRICK: Maybe because she doesn't have them.

RENA: She does. She has to-

PATRICK: For whatever reason, for whatever happened with your father, she just plain doesn't have them. If she did, she'd give them to you. You know that.

RENA: Maybe she got mad and she threw them away.

PATRICK: She wouldn't do that.

RENA: Don't act like you're the expert on what she would or wouldn't do-

PATRICK: I happen to be her fiancé.

RENA: And I happen to be her daughter.

PATRICK: Then start acting like it.

RENA: I've got to get my letter.

PATRICK: You want your letter so you can learn more about the father you never really knew, right?

RENA: Obviously-

PATRICK: Alright. Then your letter is in the kitchen.

RENA: What? You mean-

PATRICK: A living letter.

RENA: What are you talk-

PATRICK: Your mother.

RENA: What?

PATRICK: If you want to get to know your father, why don't you stop searching for an elusive letter and start talking to your mom. She was there. She knew him.

ABBY: (Calling from offstage) Patrick, come help me get dinner set up!

RENA: Well, here's my purse, so-

PATRICK: (Calling offstage to ABBY) In a minute! I'm talking to Rena.

RENA: No, go right ahead. I think we're done here.

ABBY: (Entering quickly from the kitchen) Rena, are you and your sisters okay? I didn't mean to-

RENA: What do you think, Mom?

ABBY: I know that tonight hasn't-

RENA: You want to know what we're talking about in the bathroom?

ABBY: Only if you-

RENA: Patrick admires my brutal honesty, so I'll be brutal.

PATRICK: I didn't mean-

RENA: Stay out of this!

ABBY: This doesn't involve you.

PATRICK: Yes, I think you've made that abundantly clear.

RENA: So you want to know what's on the agenda of our meeting of the Secret Sisters' Society?

ABBY: If you want-

RENA: We're talking about cutting off all contact with you, period.

ABBY: You can't-

RENA: Even Awna agrees with us this time. You've gone too far.

ABBY: She wouldn't- you can't-

RENA: We are sick of being lied to.

ABBY: Rena, I'm not lying. There are no letters.

RENA: Don't tell me that.

ABBY: I wish there were. I wish I could make them magically appear. If I could, I would. I really would.

RENA: I don't want your excuses. I want my letter.

ABBY: I can't give you that.

RENA: Yes, you can.

(RENA exits quickly in down the hallway with her purse in hand.)

PATRICK: Look, Abby, I'm-

ABBY: She's right.

PATRICK: No. She's just upset. She-

ABBY: I can make them magically appear.

PATRICK: What?

ABBY: The letters.

PATRICK: You mean there really are letters?

ABBY: No, but there will be.

PATRICK: You don't mean-

ABBY: Yes. Patrick, you are going to write the letters.

PATRICK: I am not-

ABBY: I can't do it. They'd recognize my handwriting, but you, you could do it.

PATRICK: No, I couldn't. This is absurd.

ABBY: It's the only way. The only way to keep my family together.

PATRICK: This isn't the way to-

ABBY: It will work. I know it will.

PATRICK: Abby, I can't- I-

ABBY: Please.

PATRICK: I don't lie.

ABBY: No one is going to ask you if you wrote the letters, so you won't have to lie and say you didn't. You won't be lying.

PATRICK: Yes, I will. The act itself is a lie. It's deceitful.

ABBY: To you this is just one night, just one night that went bad, but to me, this is one episode of a thousand.

PATRICK: I don't-

ABBY: Do you know how many times tonight has happened?

PATRICK: I-

ABBY: Every time we all get together. Every time.

PATRICK: Then maybe it's a good thing you don't get together very much.

ABBY: I'm getting old Patrick.

PATRICK: You aren't-

ABBY: I don't want to die with my kids hating me.

PATRICK: You aren't going to die.

ABBY: I have a granddaughter, Patrick. I've never met her. I've never even seen her picture.

PATRICK: That's really sad, but-

ABBY: After tonight, I don't know if they'll ever come back and I can't-

PATRICK: They'll come back. They'll-

ABBY: Please. I need this release. We all do.

PATRICK: I won't know what to say.

ABBY: It's not what you say, but just that you say something. That's all that matters.

PATRICK: Words that they'll hold onto and cherish and show their kids. I can't come up with-

ABBY: Yes, you can. Just say that you love them and you miss them and-

PATRICK: I don't even know them.

ABBY: And say something good about me.

PATRICK: This isn't-

ABBY: Say that they should take care of me for him and that I was with him til the very end and that this isn't my fault.

PATRICK: I don't know if I should say-

ABBY: Why? It's the truth!

PATRICK: And the paper. It won't look twenty some years old!

ABBY: They won't notice that.

PATRICK: How can you-

ABBY: People believe what they want to believe and they want to believe this. Very badly.

PATRICK: This isn't right.

ABBY: Then what is?

PATRICK: I don't-

ABBY: Is what went on this evening right?

PATRICK: I just don't think that-

ABBY: You can put a stop to this, Patrick. You're the only one that can.

PATRICK: Will you dictate the letters to me?

ABBY: No. I wish I could, but-

PATRICK: I'd feel much better if you-

ABBY: They'll be back in here any minute and I have to keep them occupied while you go to the other room and get this thing over with, quickly. When you're finished, just come back out and leave them in my dresser drawer.

PATRICK: Your top dresser drawer?

ABBY: Yes. A few minutes later, I'll excuse myself and go and get them.

PATRICK: What will you tell-

ABBY: Exactly what they want to hear. That the letters are their Christmas presents.

PATRICK: But won't they wonder why you just told them that there aren't-

ABBY: Don't worry. I'll take care of that. You just write the letters.

PATRICK: I don't have enough time to write three epic life-altering letters. I don't see how-

ABBY: They don't have to be epic-

PATRICK: I won't know where to begin. I have no idea what he was like. His personality. His style of-

ABBY: Well, they don't either. They were so young.

PATRICK: So, they're going to base their entire perception of their father's personality on what I write?

ABBY: I guess so.

PATRICK: That's horrible. I-

ABBY: They just need something to cling on to. Anything. It's doesn't matter.

PATRICK: I can't just write anything. This is-

ABBY: You only have to-

PATRICK: I'm not going to have time. Can we at least work on it and invite them back another night-

ABBY: If they walk out that door, they won't come back. I know it. It has to be tonight.

PATRICK: Abigail, I can't do this.

ABBY: If you love me, you'll do it.

PATRICK: No. No. Do not do that to me. Don't play that game.

ABBY: It's not a-

PATRICK: Don't say something like that. Ever.

ABBY: Don't get mad at me.

PATRICK: I don't lie.

ABBY: Just this once.

PATRICK: I-

ABBY: And I'll never ask you to again. I promise.

PATRICK: Abby, I can't-

(ANNA, RENA, and WHITNEY reenter.)

ABBY: Girls, Patrick feels like he's getting the start of a migraine and-

ANNA: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

PATRICK: Thanks.

ABBY: So, you wouldn't think him rude if he retired to the bedroom for a little bit to lie down and try to get over this thing before it gets any worse.

WHITNEY: No, of course not.

ANNA: Go right ahead.

ABBY: Okay, well, it's settled then.

PATRICK: I don't think I need to lie-

ABBY: Go ahead and go lie down sweetie.

PATRICK: I-

ABBY: You can come back out when you're feeling better.

WHITNEY: You really don't look very good.

ABBY: Well, I'm sure after he lies down for a few minutes, everything will be all better.

ANNA: I hope.

ABBY: Dinner should be ready. Is it okay if we-

PATRICK: I've lost my appetite.

ABBY: It must be your headache.

PATRICK: That must be it.

ABBY: Well girls, let's go to the-

PATRICK: Do you want me to put the food on the table?

ABBY: No, I can do it.

ANNA: I'll help.

ABBY: Okay, after you.

ANNA: I hope you feel better, Patrick.

RENA: Yea. Rest up.

A Thousand Variations
On A Lie Told Once
By Stacey Lane

(The girls exit. PATRICK turns to go to the bedroom. ABBY grabs his arm.)

ABBY: Thank-you. I love you.

(PATRICK breaks free of her grasp and walks out of the room. ABBY silently watches him leave as the lights slowly fade to black.)

ACT TWO

(The lights come up slowly with RENA, WHITNEY, ANNA, and ABBY sitting in the living room. Each has a plate of pie and is enjoying it immensely.)

RENA: This is decadent!

WHITNEY: Amazing!

RENA: Scrumptious!

WHITNEY: Superb!

RENA: Magneficito!

ABBY: I'm glad you like it.

WHITNEY: I haven't had pie this good since- Well, I've never had pie this good.

ABBY: Well, he's a talented guy.

ANNA: I'd say so.

WHITNEY: I've never met a guy who could bake a pie before.

RENA: At least not a guy that was straight.

WHITNEY: True.

ANNA: Dinner was wonderful.

ABBY: Well, thank-you Anna.

WHITNEY: It's Awna.

ABBY: Sorry, I-

RENA: How many times are we going to have to remind you?

ABBY: I've called her Anna her whole life. It's hard to-

RENA: Well, get used to it.

WHITNEY: Things change.

RENA: But some people never do.

ABBY: What is that suppose to-

ANNA: It's okay. You can call me-

WHITNEY: Besides, what are you saying thank-you for? You didn't cook it.

ABBY: I was just-

ANNA: Can we please-

ABBY: We had a nice dinner. Can't we just-

RENA: Sure.

WHITNEY: Okay.

(There is a short pause, as they search for a safe topic of conversation.)

RENA: This pie is good.

WHITNEY: Really good.

ABBY: Yes. It is.

WHITNEY: Dinner was good.

ABBY: Yes. It was.

RENA: So what should we talk about now?

ABBY: I don't know. What would you like to-

RENA: It doesn't matter.

ABBY: Of course it does.

RENA: I just meant-

ABBY: I haven't seen you all in so long. What-

WHITNEY: We have a lot going on. We-

ABBY: Well, I'd like to hear about it.

WHITNEY: What do you want to know?

ABBY: Well, I-

RENA: Ask away. We aren't hiding anything.

ABBY: I didn't imply that you were-

WHITNEY: Well you-

ABBY: I'd like to hear more about my granddaughter. I wish-

(PATRICK enters from the hallway.)

PATRICK: Hey!

ABBY: Hello sweetheart! I missed you.

ANNA: Are you feeling better?

ABBY: I'm sure he is, now that he's rested.

RENA: So your migraine's gone?

PATRICK: Yea, but now I got a sick feeling in my stomach.

ANNA: I'm sorry to hear that.

ABBY: I guess you don't want dinner then? We saved you-

PATRICK: No.

WHITNEY: Dinner was great!

PATRICK: Thanks.

RENA: Compliments to the chef!

PATRICK: I'm glad you liked it.

ANNA: We really did.

WHITNEY: And this pie is amazing. How did you-

PATRICK: Old secret family recipe. I'll have to give it to you.

WHITNEY: I really don't cook-

PATRICK: It's easy.

RENA: So what did you substitute for the eggs?

PATRICK: Excuse me?

RENA: Well, meringue pie usually has eggs in the-

PATRICK: I used eggs.

(RENA violently spits out her bite of pie into her plate.)

PATRICK: What's the-

ANNA: Are you okay?

RENA: You mean I've been eating liquid chicken?

ABBY: What?

RENA: Liquid chicken. Eggs.

WHITNEY: Gross thought.

PATRICK: And not altogether-

RENA: Well, that's what it is.

ABBY: No, it's not.

RENA: (To ABBY) You lied to me!

ABBY: No I didn't-

RENA: You told me that there was nothing in there that I couldn't eat! That you made sure!

ABBY: It's pie. It doesn't have meat in it!

RENA: Eggs! Animal products! Hello!

ABBY: Vegetarians eat-

RENA: I'm not a vegetarian. I'm a vegan.

WHITNEY: She's transcended.

ABBY: Since when?

RENA: Since like four or five years ago!

WHITNEY: Why don't you know anything about your kids?

ABBY: Because you don't tell me anything!

RENA: You lied to me!

ABBY: I did not!

RENA: You knew about the eggs and you-

ABBY: I didn't think about it. I didn't-

RENA: Well, you should have!

PATRICK: Ladies, if we could just-

RENA: I'm never going to trust you again!

ANNA: Rena, please-

ABBY: Like you trusted me before!

WHITNEY: Whose fault is that?

ABBY: I have done nothing but-

RENA: I got to go get rid of this stuff before it-

ABBY: What are you-

RENA: I got to go gag myself.

ABBY: No, you don't.

PATRICK: That's not healthy.

RENA: I don't want that stuff in my body.

PATRICK: You shouldn't-

WHITNEY: Man! How many people are going to throw up in that bathroom today?

ANNA: I wish you wouldn't-

PATRICK: Look, if we could all just calm down and-

(RENA runs out of the room in the direction of the bathroom.)

WHITNEY: Well, isn't this-

PATRICK: It's the second door to the-

WHITNEY: She knows that. She lived in this house for eighteen years.

PATRICK: Sorry, I forgot.

WHITNEY: You're the newcomer. Not us.

ANNA: Whitney, can you please-

WHITNEY: Anna, can you please stop it with the "Can you please's". I'm going to say whatever the hell I want, okay?

ANNA: Sorry.

WHITNEY: Like I was saying, we lived-

PATRICK: From what your mother tells me, you haven't been around for the last six years, so I don't think that you're quite in a position to-

WHITNEY: Did she tell you how many times in the last six years she's invited me over? Did she mention that little fact?

PATRICK: I don't see-

WHITNEY: Once. And here I am.

PATRICK: Well, after the way you've behaved tonight, I'm not surprised to hear that you aren't invited over very often.

WHITNEY: Hey! In case you haven't noticed, she's not exactly blameless.

PATRICK: You need to show your mother more respect. She's-

WHITNEY: Don't talk to me like you're my father.

PATRICK: I wasn't-

WHITNEY: You're not and you never will be.

PATRICK: She has sacrificed so much for you. She has-

ABBY: Stop talking about me like I'm not here, both of you.

PATRICK: I'm just getting really sick of all this bickering and fighting-

WHITNEY: Do you think I like to fight with-

PATRICK: Yes.

WHITNEY: Well, I don't.

ABBY: Still. He's got a point that-

WHITNEY: I don't care what-

PATRICK: Do you have any idea what started this latest eruption between you and your mother?

WHITNEY: I can't quite recall.

PATRICK: See, my point exactly.

WHITNEY: But I do recall that I didn't start a fight with her. I started one with you.

PATRICK: I-

WHITNEY: Forgot that, didn't ya?

PATRICK: That's not my point. My point is that-

(RENA renters, happier than when she left.)

RENA: Took care of that little issue.

ABBY: You-

RENA: Well, so much for my big dinner. Now some non-vegan rats will be delightfully feasting on it in some sewer somewhere.

WHITNEY: What a pleasant thought!

RENA: So what'd I miss?

ANNA: A fight about the location of the bathroom.

RENA: What?

PATRICK: Never mind.

ABBY: Why don't we play a board game? We used to-

ANNA: Okay.

RENA: Great idea. What-

ABBY: Monopoly?

RENA: Takes too long. We need to get home before Christmas.

ABBY: Clue. You girls used to love-

RENA: Miss Scarlet! What a slut!

ANNA: Clue's a great game! Let's-

RENA: I want to be Miss Scarlet.

ABBY: You've got the hair for it.

PATRICK: Miss Scarlet doesn't actually have scarlet hair.

ABBY: I know, but Rena sure does.

RENA: So, then Clue, it is. I'm Miss Scarlet and Whitney will be Miss Peacock and-

WHITNEY: I don't want to be-

RENA: But you used to always be-

PATRICK: Actually, I think it's Mrs. Peacock.

WHITNEY: Does it really matter?

ABBY: I'll be Mrs. White and-

RENA: Is the game still in the-

WHITNEY: I don't want to play. I hate that game!

ABBY: That was one of your fav-

WHITNEY: No, it wasn't.

ABBY: You used to play it all the-

WHITNEY: Only cause it's one of the few my little sisters could understand-

ABBY: I thought you-

RENA: You mean you never liked-

WHITNEY: No.

ANNA: How about Scrabble?

RENA: Way too much thought required. Too wordy.

ABBY: Patrick, what other games, do we have?

PATRICK: Well-

WHITNEY: How would he know? He doesn't live here.

PATRICK: Neither do you.

WHITNEY: I used to.

ABBY: Well, he's going to.

WHITNEY: You didn't tell us that-

ANNA: Can we all please just-

ABBY: Patrick honey, what would you like to play?

PATRICK: I'm not sure if I feel well enough to play a game.

ABBY: (Meaningfully to PATRICK) I'd like to play Sorry with you, Patrick.

RENA: No, that's a dumb game.

ANNA: I like Sorry.

PATRICK: (Back at ABBY) Well, that's too bad. Abby doesn't have it.

ABBY: Yes, I do.

PATRICK: No, you don't. Not anymore.

RENA: I thought we had-

ABBY: What happened to it?

PATRICK: You lost it.

ABBY: I did?

RENA: She did?

PATRICK: Yes.

ANNA: That's too bad.

RENA: It was a stupid game anyway.

WHITNEY: Except for the pop-a-matic bubble. That was cool.

RENA: Yea, it-

PATRICK: That's Trouble.

WHITNEY: What?

PATRICK: The pop-a-matic bubble is from Trouble, not Sorry.

WHITNEY: Oh, right. That's what I thought.

PATRICK: Abby has Trouble. She definitely has Trouble.

RENA: Who cares? They're both dumb.

ABBY: Do you need to go lie down again, Patrick?

PATRICK: No, I'm done lying down.

ABBY: Well, that's good to hear.

PATRICK: I don't think it helped. The lying down.

ABBY: I think it helped a great deal.

PATRICK: Not in the long run.

ABBY: I think that it-

PATRICK: I'm not going to be lying down anymore this evening, Abby.

WHITNEY: Isn't the proper grammar laying down, not lying?

ABBY: I don't see-

PATRICK: No. It's lying. In this case, it's definitely lying.

ABBY: I don't think it's lying.

PATRICK: Yes, it definitely is.

WHITNEY: Oh, well the grammar queen would know. It's laying.

PATRICK: No, it's lying.

RENA: I want to play a game!

ANNA: How about Trivial Pursuit?

RENA: Too trivial.

ANNA: How about Parcheesi?

RENA: Too cheesy!

ANNA: We could put together a puzzle.

RENA: That'd be too puzzling.

WHITNEY: Would you stop that?

RENA: Sorry. Want to play Sorry?

WHITNEY: That was already mentioned.

RENA: Oh, sorry.

WHITNEY: You're not funny.

RENA: Yes. I am.

WHITNEY: Okay, maybe a little.

RENA: You love me.

WHITNEY: Yes, I do.

RENA: We could play Uno.

ANNA: Sure.

ABBY: Yea, I like-

WHITNEY: No. I hate all board games.

PATRICK: Uno's not a board game.

RENA: You don't hate board games.

WHITNEY: Yes. I do. They annoy me.

RENA: You used to always play-

WHITNEY: Only cause you and Awna bugged me to-

ANNA: I thought you-

WHITNEY: It's not a big deal. I just don't like-

RENA: Why?

WHITNEY: Because you try so hard to win when there isn't actually anything to win and-

PATRICK: You're right. Maybe a competitive game isn't the best idea for-

RENA: I never knew that you hated-

WHITNEY: Well, now you know.

RENA: You learn something every day.

WHITNEY: Yea.

RENA: You know what I hate?

ANNA: What?

RENA: I hate it when I ask somebody what time it is and they just show me their watch. Or when somebody asks me what time it is and points to their wrist, like I don't know where my watch is. I mean I don't say, "Where is the restroom?" and point to my crotch. And speaking of restrooms-

WHITNEY: We weren't.

RENA: I hate complete strangers in public restrooms who ask you to hand them toilet paper under the stall because they don't have any. It's like check before you go in. Oh and people who talk on their cell phones in public restrooms.

WHITNEY: What a random-

RENA: We were talking about things we hated.

WHITNEY: No, we were-

ANNA: What about the game?

RENA: Oh and I hate people who say "ATM machine".

WHITNEY: What?

RENA: The "M" in ATM stands for "machine".

WHITNEY: Oh.

RENA: And people at a bus stop who ask if the bus has come yet. If the bus had come, I would have gotten on and not be standing here talking to you, moron!

PATRICK: Well, I hate telemarketers.

WHITNEY: We all do.

RENA: Moving on!

PATRICK: Well, I hate-

WHITNEY: You had your turn.

PATRICK: But Rena named off-

ANNA: What about the game?

WHITNEY: This is the game.

ANNA: This isn't a very-

RENA: Awna hates this game.

ANNA: I didn't say I-

WHITNEY: That counts as her turn. Mom, you're up.

ABBY: What am-

WHITNEY: What do you hate?

ABBY: This is silly.

RENA: No, it's a game. So what do-

ABBY: Oh, I don't know.

RENA: It can be anything...

ABBY: I really can't think of-

WHITNEY: A pet peeve...

ABBY: I don't really have-

RENA: Everybody has-

ABBY: I can't think of-

WHITNEY: Come on.

RENA: What do you-

ABBY: Skip me. I don't hate anything. I-

WHITNEY: Everybody hates-

ABBY: It's almost Christmas and I have my girls. I don't want to talk about what I hate.

RENA: You have to. Everybody else-

PATRICK: If she doesn't want to-

WHITNEY: Look, Paul, nobody asked-

PATRICK: If she doesn't want to play-

WHITNEY: I hate people who interrupt, but its not my turn, it's Mom's.

RENA: You're the last one. So what do you-

ABBY: I can't think-

WHITNEY: Surely you can think of-

ABBY: I don't-

RENA: Yes, you do!

ABBY: (Panicking) Well, um... I hate... I hate frogs.

PATRICK: What?

ANNA: You do?

RENA: How can that-

WHITNEY: Why?

ABBY: Yes. I think they're slimy, smelly, disgusting creatures.

RENA: You're kidding, right?

ABBY: No.

WHITNEY: Then how come you-

PATRICK: You never told me this.

ABBY: You never asked.

PATRICK: Well, just look at your house. It's without discussion.

ABBY: No. I hate frogs. I always have.

WHITNEY: How can that be-

ANNA: When we were little, you always-

ABBY: Have you ever seen me buy a frog anything?

WHITNEY: Well, no.

PATRICK: Come to think of it. I-

ABBY: Well, there you go!

RENA: That's because everybody buys them for you!

ABBY: Exactly.

PATRICK: What are you-

RENA: But everybody buys them for you because you like them.

ABBY: No, I hate them.

WHITNEY: But you collect them.

ABBY: Only because people keep giving them to me.

RENA: Well, obviously people started giving them to you for a reason.

WHITNEY: Yea, you must have liked them at some point.

PATRICK: And now, you've just gotten sick of them. That's understandable.

ABBY: Nope. Always hated them.

PATRICK: Then why-

ABBY: That's what I'm trying to-

PATRICK: Well, go ahead.

WHITNEY: Don't interrupt her. She's trying to talk.

ABBY: (Picking up a very ugly large ceramic frog figurine) It all started with this one.

RENA: So you bought that one and then decided you-

ABBY: No, I told you. I've never bought a frog.

RENA: Then how did you-

ABBY: Cynthia Brookshire.

RENA: Huh?

ABBY: My best friend in college.

WHITNEY: Oh.

ABBY: Her and I met in anatomy class where we had to dissect a-

PATRICK: A frog!

ABBY: Yes. We were lab partners. We thought it was gross and cruel and icky-

RENA: Being lab partners?

ABBY: No, dissecting frogs.

RENA: Oh.

ABBY: Anyway, so we-

WHITNEY: So she bought you this frog?

ABBY: Yes, as a joke.

RENA: So you-

ABBY: To celebrate that fact that we passed the class-barely-and that we'd never have to look at another frog ever again. (She looks around the room and gestures weakly.)

RENA: (There is a small pause and then RENA bursts into laughter) Sorry. Surely, you see the humor in this situation.

ABBY: I suppose.

PATRICK: I still don't see how having one frog would make people think you-

ABBY: So one day, my aunt came to visit me in my dorm and she saw the frog-

WHITNEY: So she assumed you-

ABBY: She complimented it and said she had one by the same maker. So-

RENA: You didn't tell her-

ABBY: She asked me if I liked frogs.

RENA: And you said yes.

ABBY: The only time in my life I have ever said I liked frogs.

PATRICK: Why didn't you just say "no"?

ABBY: After she just finished telling me how much she liked them. I couldn't do that.

RENA: You could have politely said that you-

ABBY: I just nodded and agreed with her. Just like I always sit back and agree with everybody and let everybody walk all over me.

WHITNEY: It's just frogs. It's not that deep.

PATRICK: Go on, honey.

ABBY: Anyway, for my next birthday she enrolled me in a frog-of-the-month club.

PATRICK: A what?

ABBY: I don't know what it's called. One of those places where they send you a new little ceramic frog each month. Anyway, they-

PATRICK: They have those?

WHITNEY: Apparently.

ABBY: Anyway, I got more frogs. They got more compliments and-

RENA: And people kept buying you frogs.

ABBY: Yep. The collection began. And thirty odd years later, well... (She gestures to the frog-filled room)

PATRICK: Well, it makes it easier to shop for someone if there's something that you know they like.

RENA: Or at least you think they like, as the case may be.

ABBY: And once you categorize someone, it's easy to keep them in that category.

WHITNEY: Him or her in his or her.

ABBY: What are you-

WHITNEY: If you categorize someone, it's easier to keep him or her in his or her category, not them or their.

ABBY: What does that have to-

WHITNEY: I just want my mother to use proper grammar.

ABBY: I don't need you to mock-

PATRICK: So, would you girls like to exchange Christmas presents now?

(RENA, WHITNEY, and ABBY exchange knowing glances and hesitate.)

RENA: No, I don't think-

WHITNEY: Now's not possibly the best time to-

ANNA: I'm not really in the mood to-

ABBY: Now, don't be silly! Let's do gifts! We need something to cheer us all up!

ANNA: I really don't think we should-

ABBY: You girls used to beg me to let you open-

RENA: Maybe we should wait til Christmas to open the presents.

ABBY: You're staying for Christmas?

RENA: No, no. I meant you could open them on Christmas day when we're gone.

WHITNEY: They look so pretty sitting under your tree. You should-

ABBY: Can't you stay for Christmas?

RENA: We really have to-

ABBY: You could sleep in your old bedrooms. It'd be like old times!

WHITNEY: We really can't-

ANNA: I'm sorry. I have to work early the next morning. We've got a big After Christmas Sale and lots of returns-

RENA: I've got a plane to catch.

WHITNEY: And I have to get back to my family.

ABBY: I'm your family.

WHITNEY: My daughter is my family.

ABBY: And my daughters are mine. Please stay.

RENA: We really can't.

ANNA: I'm sorry.

PATRICK: So about those Christmas presents.

ABBY: Yes. Yes. Let's exchange gifts.

WHITNEY: I still don't think-

ABBY: Babies first!

PATRICK: Do you want me to get their presents-

ABBY: No, I want my presents from you girls first. Is that okay?

WHITNEY: But you said babies first.

ABBY: I meant the baby gives me her gift first.

ANNA: That's fine. (ANNA crosses to the tree and collects her gift.)

ABBY: This is so much fun. I love Christmas.

RENA: Oh, just you wait.

ANNA: Here you go. This is for you and Patrick, from me.

ABBY: Thank-you, dear. (As she unwraps the present.) Oh, what beautiful wrapping paper. And the bow is so pretty. (She finishes unwrapping it. It is a painting of a frog.) Oh.

ANNA: You don't have to hang it up.

ABBY: No, of course I will-

ANNA: I painted it before I knew that you didn't-

ABBY: It's lovely.

PATRICK: You painted it yourself?

ANNA: Yes.

PATRICK: Wow! It's really good.

ANNA: Thanks.

WHITNEY: She's the best.

ABBY: I love it. Thank-you, sweetie.

ANNA: But you think frogs are ugly.

ABBY: Not this one.

ANNA: I can paint you something else.

ABBY: No, this is wonderful.

PATRICK: It's really nice.

ABBY: Patrick, go get a nail and a hammer. Let's hang it up right now.

ANNA: You don't have to-

ABBY: I want to. You made it for me. That makes it really special.

PATRICK: Why don't you open up the rest of your gifts first and then we can hang it up?

ABBY: Okay.

RENA: I guess I'm up.

ABBY: Yep.

RENA: And I'm not even covered under the "You made it for me, so it's special" clause.

ABBY: What?

RENA: Oh, you'll know what I mean in a second. (She hands her the gift.) Feliz Navidad!

ABBY: Thanks! (ABBY begins to unwraps it.) What's in here?

PATRICK: What is it?

RENA: Oh, the suspense is killing me.

ABBY: (She unwraps a ceramic frog statue.) It's a frog!

RENA: Surprise!

ABBY: Thank-you, Rena.

RENA: I can return it, if you want.

ABBY: No, of course not. It's a gift from my daughter. I'll display it proudly. (She sits it on her coffee table.)

RENA: You really don't have to.

ABBY: I want to.

RENA: Something you've already proclaimed that you loathe and despise and now you're going to display it so you can think of me. Great!

ABBY: Rena, it's not like that. I didn't know you were going to get me frogs for Christmas.

RENA: We get you frogs every year. Always have.

ABBY: It slipped my mind. I'm sorry.

(WHITNEY crosses to the tree and retrieves her gift.)

RENA: It's okay.

WHITNEY: Well, last and certainly least. (She hands ABBY the present.) Merry Christmas, Mom.

ABBY: Thank-you Whitney. (ABBY begins to unwrap the gift.)

WHITNEY: Bet you can guess what this is going to be.

ABBY: Oh, well... (The present is open. It is a sweatshirt with a picture of a large frog on the front.) How nice.

WHITNEY: Don't humor me. And don't worry, I still got the receipt.

ABBY: Don't be silly. (As she slips it on.) It's beautiful. And a perfect fit.

WHITNEY: You really don't have to wear that on my behalf.

ABBY: I love it.

WHITNEY: Well, now you know why we didn't want to-

ABBY: I didn't think that sounded like my girls. Well, now it's the moment you've all been waiting for. Your turn. Babies first. Anna. You-

WHITNEY: It's Anna.

RENA: I am so sick of this babies first thing!

PATRICK: What does that mean anyway?

RENA: I want to go first.

ABBY: It's just a system we started when the girls were little where we always go in order from youngest to oldest.

RENA: And I never go first.

WHITNEY: At least you aren't always last.

ABBY: I never knew that it bothered you.

RENA: Well it does.

ABBY: Fine. Then you can go first. (To ANNA) Is that okay?

ANNA: Of course.

ABBY: (To RENA) Your present is under the tree- the one in the silver paper.

RENA: Thanks! (RENA rushes to the tree and searches for her gift.)

WHITNEY: Well, you sure are excited.

RENA: I think I'm really going to like this gift. (RENA has located her gift.)

ABBY: I hope you will.

RENA: I think it might be exactly what I've always wanted.

ABBY: Well, I don't know about that, but I think you'll-

(RENA tears open the package and pulls out a purse. She immediately begins to search the inside of the purse, frantically searching each compartment.)

ANNA: Wow! Isn't that pretty?

ABBY: I saw it and it just instantly reminded me of Rena.

WHITNEY: It's really nice.

PATRICK: What are you looking for?

ABBY: Did you expect your purse to come full of money? Sorry, kiddo.

RENA: Where is it?

ABBY: Where's what?

RENA: My letter. My letter from Dad is supposed to be in here!

ABBY: Honey, I-

RENA: That's what tonight was all about. It was suppose to be my Christmas present. I knew that it was. It was going to be perfect. Where is my letter?

(ABBY crosses silently to the bedroom.)

ANNA: Will you stop it, Rena! She doesn't have it! When are you going to understand that? You're never going to get your letter!

WHITNEY: Awna, please-

ANNA: There are no letters! There never were any letters! Just let it go and move on and stop being ridiculous and mean! She doesn't have your letter.

(ABBY appears in the hallway holding three envelopes.)

ABBY: I was going to wait til after you opened your other presents, but Rena was just too clever for me. She figured out my surprise.

ANNA: The letters.

WHITNEY: Oh my God. There really are-

ANNA: Where did you-

ABBY: Truth be told, I lost the letters.

RENA: I knew it!

ABBY: I was so ashamed that I said there weren't any. I'm so sorry.

WHITNEY: You mean, you-

ABBY: When your father died, with the funeral and the hospital and the family visiting and all, it was so hectic. They got misplaced.

ANNA: When did you-

ABBY: I came across them about three weeks ago when cleaning the attic.

ANNA: Which is when you called us.

ABBY: The second I found them. I wanted you all together in person to hear the news.

ANNA: Rena knew it! She was right all along!

ABBY: I wanted it to be a surprise, but you kids are just too smart for me.

ANNA: She knew it!

ABBY: That's why I denied it at first-

WHITNEY: I don't see why you would-

ABBY: I just wanted you girls to be happy. Finally after-

ANNA: Can I have my letter please?

ABBY: Of course, dear. Here. (She hands her an envelope.)

(ANNA settles in a chair to read it.)

RENA: (Snatching her envelope from ABBY) You are such a liar.

ABBY: What do you mean? You-

RENA: All this time, you knew there were letters and you continually lied to us. Now I really do hate you.

ABBY: Rena, I just wanted you to be happy-

RENA: I'm not.

WHITNEY: All that matters now is that we have our letters. Let it go Rena. Can I have mine please?

ABBY: Yes dear.

WHITNEY: Thanks, Mom! (WHITNEY kisses ABBY on the cheek and then crosses to the couch to read her letter.)

RENA: I can't believe you! You think everything is better now because you finally told us the truth! Years and years of lying just washed away.

ABBY: Why don't you just read your letter, Rena?

RENA: I'm not sure if I want to read it around you.

ABBY: Please. Just read it. I gave you what you wanted.

RENA: I had an ounce of hope left for you, but now that's gone.

ABBY: Rena, I just wanted you to be happy-

RENA: When I leave tonight, I am not coming back.

ABBY: Don't say that-

RENA: I'm cutting all ties with you.

ABBY: How can you-

RENA: I've got my letter now, so I have no more use for you. I won't be-

ABBY: I thought your letter would make you happy.

RENA: An honest mother would make me happy.

ANNA: I think I will stay for Christmas after all.

ABBY: Sweetheart, that's-

ANNA: I'm going to go sleep in my old room. Goodnight Mommy.

ABBY: Goodnight, sweetie.

(ANNA gives ABBY a quick kiss on the forehead and then exits.)

RENA: Yea, I guess I'll go read mine in my room too, away from you.

(RENA storms out.)

ABBY: Well...

WHITNEY: Mom...

ABBY: Yes, dear.

(There is an awkward silence. Both of the women look at PATRICK.)

PATRICK: I think that this doesn't involve me. I'll go do the dishes.

(PATRICK exits to the kitchen.)

ABBY: Did you enjoy your letter?

WHITNEY: The letter isn't real, is it?

ABBY: What?

WHITNEY: Dad didn't write this letter, did he?

ABBY: I don't know what you mean. Who else would have?

WHITNEY: You handed me this letter and I thought this is it. This is everything I've been waiting for. Everything I've been wondering about all these years.

ABBY: Whitney, what-

WHITNEY: But then I started to read it, and something didn't feel right. I didn't see Dad. I saw her.

ABBY: Her? Her who?

WHITNEY: This girl in my class. When Dad was really sick.

ABBY: What does this-

WHITNEY: She brought it in for Show and Tell, a letter that her grandpa had written her right before he died and-

ABBY: I don't see-

WHITNEY: And I wanted Dad to do the same for us. I really really wanted him to. I hoped he'd promise to-

ABBY: So, you asked him to-

WHITNEY: No, I should have. But instead I just prayed and prayed that he would do it. I mean the girl in my class kept telling us that her grandpa wrote the letter because he loved her so much and I thought that Dad loved us, so he would too.

ABBY: Of course he loved you.

WHITNEY: But then he died and there weren't any letters. I was sure there had to be. I had prayed so hard. So I figured you must have had them.

ABBY: Well, I-

WHITNEY: I thought that if I told you he promised us letters, you would hand them over. I was little. I don't know what I was thinking.

ABBY: But you said that he, all these years you said-

WHITNEY: I guess I lied. At first. But then I started to believe myself and second guess my memories. Maybe he did say it. See the thing is I remember that girl telling me and I remember telling Rena and I remember Rena and me telling you, but I don't remember Dad telling me.

ABBY: This is confusing.

WHITNEY: I know. Memories...they get really foggy for me.

ABBY: But he told Rena. She said that he-

WHITNEY: No, I told Rena. When we were little. She thinks she remembers him telling her. She remembers wrong.

ABBY: You don't know that-

WHITNEY: I think I made it up, Mom.

ABBY: Why would-

WHITNEY: He should have written us goodbye letters. Any father who loved his kids would have.

ABBY: Your father loved you.

WHITNEY: I don't know.

ABBY: I do.

WHITNEY: Well, he didn't promise us letters. He didn't write us letters. It's time this ended, Mom.

ABBY: Well, maybe he did write the letters, but he didn't tell you, because I found letters and-

WHITNEY: Look. The letter starts out, "Here's the letter I promised you." He never-

ABBY: Maybe he meant to tell you and didn't get around to it or maybe he told you and you forgot.

WHITNEY: No. I don't think so.

ABBY: Well, maybe he only told Rena.

WHITNEY: No, I told Rena.

ABBY: Well, maybe he did too.

WHITNEY: Listen to the way Rena tells the story. She tells it just like me. She's not telling her memory. She's telling mine. And I'm not telling my memory. I'm telling some other little girl's.

ABBY: Well, then, there must be some reasonable-

WHITNEY: Besides, this paper doesn't look twenty years old.

ABBY: Of course it does. It-

WHITNEY: I'm sorry, Mom. I'm sorry for causing you pain. I love you.

ABBY: I love you, too.

WHITNEY: Now, admit that the letters are fake.

ABBY: There's just got to be some mistake. You're memory just isn't-

WHITNEY: No. I remember, not remembering.

ABBY: How can you remember not remembering?

WHITNEY: I remember that girl saying that- but I don't remember Dad-

ABBY: You're just confused, honey. You're over emotional. You just don't remember how it really happened, that's all. But, now you have your letter, so clearly-

WHITNEY: No, Mom. I've been confused for a long time and now I think I finally figured it out and I need you to support me.

(RENA appears silently in the doorway.)

ABBY: Yes. The letters are not real. Patrick wrote them during dinner. I made him. I'm sorry. I just didn't want you girls to hate me.

WHITNEY: We don't hate you. I'm sorry that I made up the thing about Dad promising us letters.

ABBY: It's okay. You were just a child.

(RENA rips her letter into many little pieces. She drops the pieces on the ground as she rips them. The noise startles ABBY and WHITNEY and they turn to see her.)

ABBY: Rena, I didn't-

RENA: That was the most beautiful thing I have ever read in my life and now I find out that just like everything else in my life, it's just a fake.

WHITNEY: Rena, we didn't mean to-

RENA: Written by Patrick of all people.

ABBY: There's nothing wrong with Patrick. I asked-

RENA: I'm giving you one minute to explain this thing, before I walk out that door, hop on my plane, and never talk to either one of you again.

WHITNEY: Don't make idle threats.

RENA: I'm dead serious.

ABBY: Well, your sister just told me that-

WHITNEY: No, I'll do it.

ABBY: Okay.

WHITNEY: When we were kids, I knew this girl that received a letter from her dead grandmother-

RENA: What does-

WHITNEY: And I became obsessed with the idea that Dad left letters for us. And when I didn't get a letter, I told Mom that Dad had promised me one because I thought that would somehow make my letter magically appear.

RENA: I don't-

WHITNEY: Or that God could have him write them from Heaven or something. I don't know. It made sense at the time.

RENA: So you're saying that Dad never promised us letters?

WHITNEY: Yes.

RENA: That's impossible. He told me too. We were both there.

WHITNEY: No, you just remember being told you remember. And that's a very different thing.

RENA: But I remember-

WHITNEY: You remember my story.

RENA: You're just making this up to cover for her.

WHITNEY: Why would I-

RENA: To cover up the fact that she had her boyfriend forge our letters because she lost the originals.

ABBY: I know I was wrong. I just-

WHITNEY: No, Rena. There never were any letters and that's the truth.

RENA: Funny. That word seems to be used pretty lightly around here. Truth.

WHITNEY: Well, you know what Lenin said-

ABBY: "All you need is love?"

WHITNEY: No, I-

ABBY: Wait. Are we talking about the Beatles Lennon or the Communist Lenin?

WHITNEY: It doesn't matter.

RENA: I'm sure they both had a lot to say.

WHITNEY: True, but among them, was "A lie told often enough becomes truth."

ABBY: That's-

RENA: So then when did this lie become truth?

WHITNEY: I don't know, but somewhere along the lines, for me, it did. It blurred-I convinced myself that-

RENA: This is ridiculous. You're lying.

ABBY: No, she was lying then, but not now.

RENA: How do you know?

ABBY: I know.

WHITNEY: I'm sorry Rena, but it was me who told you about the letters, not Dad, and I heard the story from someone else, not Dad.

RENA: You can't tell me that my memories aren't real. You can't.

WHITNEY: I'm not saying they aren't real. They're just not yours.

RENA: That is not fair. You can't-

WHITNEY: Please, Rena. Just accept this. Dad didn't promise us letters. I'm sorry.

RENA: You're certain?

WHITNEY: Yes.

RENA: I think he told me. I remember it.

WHITNEY: No, you don't.

RENA: Yes, I do.

ABBY: Maybe he did tell her.

WHITNEY: Well, maybe he did. Maybe he didn't. I guess we will never know. He's dead.

ABBY: Well the evidence point to the fact that he didn't.

RENA: You don't-

ABBY: I haven't found any letters and believe me I've spent twenty years or so searching frantically for them.

WHITNEY: Then there aren't any letters. It's finished.

RENA: Mom, I'm sorry about all the mean things I said over the years. You didn't deserve them.

ABBY: Well, that's-

RENA: Whitney did.

ABBY: Now, don't blame her. She was young and-

RENA: She wasn't young when she kept the lie alive.

WHITNEY: I didn't-

ABBY: Please don't blame-

RENA: And you're not blameless either, Mom. Forging those letters, falsifying something that important to us is just unforgivable.

ABBY: I just wanted to make you happy.

RENA: Look around. We're not happy.

WHITNEY: Awna's happy.

RENA: We'll she sure won't be when she hears the news.

WHITNEY: No, you can't.

RENA: What do you mean-

WHITNEY: You can't tell her. Please.

RENA: What? Of course I-

WHITNEY: No, please-

RENA: I have to let her know that that stupid letter that she's cuddling up with right now and memorizing isn't really from her father. It's a fake.

WHITNEY: No, let her keep it. Every memory she has of him is fake. Why should this be any different?

ABBY: I don't see how-

WHITNEY: If it makes her happy, don't spoil it.

RENA: What do you mean that every memory is-

WHITNEY: Well, it is. She doesn't have a single true memory of him. She just has memories of all the stories we've told her over the years.

ABBY: She must remember-

RENA: We have to tell her the truth.

WHITNEY: What's "the truth" anyway?

RENA: There's been too much lying in this house and it's time to-

ABBY: No, Rena.

WHITNEY: She needs this.

RENA: She going to spend the rest of her life fawning over words written to her by a man that just met her a few hours ago.

WHITNEY: Why not? If it makes her happy.

RENA: This is wrong. This is very wrong.

ABBY: I don't believe in right and wrong anymore.

RENA: Well, I do and I'm telling her.

WHITNEY: No.

ABBY: It'd crush her.

RENA: Fine. I won't tell her-

WHITNEY: Oh, thank-you.

ABBY: That probably really is for the best.

RENA: But I'm certainly not going to lie to her about it.

ABBY: She won't ask you if the letter is real, so you won't have to tell her it isn't. You won't be lying.

RENA: No. That is lying and I am not going to lie to her. So... I guess I'm cutting off communication with her too.

ABBY: You can't do that.

RENA: Oh yes, I can.

WHITNEY: How could-

RENA: I live on the other side of the country. It'll be easy.

ABBY: Please-

RENA: Merry Christmas. (She rushes out the door.)

WHITNEY: I got to go. We rode here together.

ABBY: I can drive you home later.

WHITNEY: No, I'd rather go with Rena.

ABBY: But, I thought you and I could-

WHITNEY: I really got to go.

ABBY: Whitney, if I don't see Rena again, could you-

WHITNEY: Come on, you know you'll see her again-

ABBY: I don't know-

WHITNEY: You know how Rena can be.

ABBY: I know.

WHITNEY: I have the keys. I can't leave Rena out in the cold.

ABBY: Whitney, I-

WHITNEY: Goodbye. (She reaches quickly into her wallet and hands ABBY a photograph, without looking at her.) Merry Christmas.

ABBY: Oh, she's- She looks just like you when you were a-

(WHITNEY exits hurriedly after RENA, without looking back. ABBY, once again, is left alone center stage. She stares at the photograph with a sense of wonder and then sits it on the end table.)

ABBY: (Calling) Patrick, honey, you can come back out now!

PATRICK: (Entering) Is everything okay?

(PATRICK briefly eyes the torn letter on the floor.)

ABBY: Fine.

PATRICK: What'd Whitney want to talk to you about, if you don't mind me asking?

ABBY: Oh, just mother, daughter stuff. She wanted to thank me for her letter.

PATRICK: Oh, then it worked out okay?

ABBY: Yes, like a charm. You did good Patrick.

PATRICK: What about Rena? She didn't seem to be taking it very well.

ABBY: Yes, well, that all changed once she actually read the letter. It must have been well written.

PATRICK: I did my best. So they took off then?

ABBY: Yes. They left happy.

PATRICK: It looks like Whitney didn't open her present.

ABBY: Oh, it completely slipped my mind.

PATRICK: Oh well. She can get it next time she comes over.

ABBY: I don't know when-

PATRICK: Well, now that this letter situation is taken care of, they'll be coming over a lot more often, right?

ABBY: Oh, yes. I imagine they will.

PATRICK: I still feel horrible.

ABBY: But it all worked out so well.

PATRICK: I know this is going to sound strange, but what kind of peanut butter do you use?

ABBY: Where did that come from?

PATRICK: Just answer the question, okay?

ABBY: Whatever is on sale. Why?

PATRICK: Never mind. It's dumb.

ABBY: Are you feeling okay?

PATRICK: I think I need to go home now.

ABBY: So soon?

PATRICK: After everything that's happened tonight.

ABBY: You did the right thing.

PATRICK: No. I don't feel right about it.

ABBY: You became the father to my children. Isn't that what you wanted?

PATRICK: No, not like this. Goodnight, Abby.

ABBY: Are you mad at me?

PATRICK: It's been a long night. I'm tired.

ABBY: Well, I'll see you tomorrow then, for Christmas.

PATRICK: Abby, I've changed my mind. I think I'd like to spend Christmas with my family.

ABBY: But we had-

PATRICK: I'm sorry.

ABBY: But I don't want to be alone on Ch-

PATRICK: I'll have my family and you'll have Awna. You'll-

ABBY: You mean you call her Awna, too?

PATRICK: Of course. That's her name now.

ABBY: But, I named her-

PATRICK: You really need to stop living in the past.

ABBY: I don't-

PATRICK: Goodbye, Abby. Merry Christmas!

(PATRICK gives ABBY a kiss on the forehead and exits out the front door quickly. ABBY is left alone.)

ABBY: (Calling down the hall) Sweetheart, do you need anything?

ANNA: (Offstage) What Mommy?

(ABBY begins to straighten up the room.)

ABBY: (Calling) You okay, sweetie?

(ABBY sees the torn pieces of the letter. She quickly disposes of them, just as ANNA emerges from the hallway wearing an old pair of adorable pajamas that are just a tad bit too small. She carries her letter.)

ANNA: I'm wonderful.

ABBY: You look cute.

ANNA: I found them in my drawer and I figured...

ABBY: I guess it's just you and me, *Awna*. Everybody else-

ANNA: You can call me Anna.

ABBY: No, if you want to-

ANNA: Please. Just Anna.

ABBY: Thank-you.

ANNA: It's what you and Dad named me.

ABBY: Actually, your dad wanted to call you Gertie.

ANNA: Seriously?

ABBY: Yes, after his favorite great aunt.

ANNA: I never knew that.

ABBY: But I convinced him otherwise.

ANNA: I'm glad you did.

ABBY: Yes, well, either way, you would have been named after someone who died. I'm sorry. I didn't realize that would-

ANNA: It's okay. It's an honor.

ABBY: Yes.

ANNA: Would you like to read my letter? It's really beautiful.

ABBY: No, that's between you and your father.

ANNA: He wrote such wonderful things about you.

ABBY: He did?

ANNA: How you were with him til the end.

ABBY: Yes, well...

ANNA: How you took care of him and stayed with him when everyone else...

ABBY: Well, I tried...

ANNA: Mom...

ABBY: Yes, honey.

ANNA: Do you think maybe- well I was thinking... My apartment is so small and I'm always struggling to make rent and-

ABBY: Honey, if you need money, I can-

ANNA: No. I, well, I was thinking that maybe I could move back here for a little while if that's-

ABBY: Oh, I'd love that!

ANNA: Really?

ABBY: More than anything.

ANNA: It wouldn't be a problem?

ABBY: No. No, not at all.

ANNA: What about Patrick? Would he mind?

ABBY: Oh, don't worry about him. I'd never let a man come between me and my daughters.

ANNA: Mom, you know what we're going do tomorrow?

ABBY: What dear?

ANNA: We're going to get rid of all these frogs.

ABBY: Don't be silly. How could I part with all these memories?

A Thousand Variations
On A Lie Told Once
By Stacey Lane

(Lights fade slowly to black.)

A Thousand Variations On A Lie Told Once