

A FAMILY AFFAIR

A Lincoln Hills Players Readers Theater Presentation

February 1, 2, 2025

Written and Directed

By Alan Lowe

CAST

Gayle, age 63 (2015), 73 (2025)

Michael, Gayle's husband, age 65 (2015), 75 (2025)

Kim, Gayle and Michael's #1 daughter, age 38

Cassie, daughter #2, age 36

Laurie, daughter #3, identical twin, age 30

Katie, daughter #4, identical twin, age 30

Gary, Gayle's cousin, age 74

Myra, Gary's wife, age 71

Walter, Gayle's cousin, age 68

***Young Woman, Lisa**, age 32 (2 lines)

Jeremy, Gayle's cousin, age 70

Melissa, Jeremy's wife, age 66

Tommy True aka "Nathan Thomas Truman," handyman? age 65

***Norma**, Jeremy and Melissa's friend and neighbor, age 65 (6 speeches)

***Dexter**, mailman, age mid-fifties (4 short speeches)

7 female parts

5 male parts

*3 parts to be combined with other roles

A FAMILY AFFAIR

MFX: “AS TIME GOES BY” BY HENRY MANCINI-THEN FADES OUT

SCENE 1: TEN YEARS AGO, 2015

GAYLE: (NARRATES) Michael and I sat at the kitchen table staring off into space. Then I glanced at the calendar propped up on the windowsill. It read, “February 2, 2015.” I shook my head wondering how time can pass so quickly. I turned toward Michael. (MURMUR) Michael, we’ve lived in the Bay Area for over forty years. We live in a nice community and Marin County is great. I love our two-story, five-bedroom house. And living with our four wonderful daughters was a blessing—until they left for college. We should be living the dream, but . . .

MICHAEL: Yeah we should be, Gayle, . . . but who could have predicted that our four grown girls and their children and thirty-eight other relatives, all on your side of the family, would move into housing developments within three miles of our home. Your parents, both over eighty-three, and aunts, uncles, and cousins, of every age, size, and shape sometimes make our life a living . . .

GAYLE: Don’t say it, Michael. I love my family with a passion.

MICHAEL: I know you do.

GAYLE: But . . .

MICHAEL: But what, Gayle?

GAYLE: At times, I feel trapped.

MICHAEL: Trapped? What do you mean by that?

GAYLE: Remember when I had to go to Urgent Care three weeks ago.

MICHAEL: Yes, I do. So what?

GAYLE: Well, the doctor on duty was my cousin, Carl. And three of the patients in the waiting room were my Uncle Sal, Aunt Lucille, and cousin Barry. I felt like I was at a family reunion.

MICHAEL: Okay, isn't that a good thing? They were all very friendly, weren't they?

GAYLE: Friendly? You call telling me about how every part of their body ached being friendly. I was there because my stomach was so bloated I thought it was going to burst. And their moaning and groaning only made my problem worse. I just wanted to be left alone—have some privacy.

MICHAEL: They're your family, Gayle. Don't they mean well?

GAYLE: (PLEADING) You're not hearing me, Michael. Just listen to me. On our date nights, you and I have gone to nice, quiet restaurants to have a romantic meal—alone. However, we usually are surrounded by a minimum of six relatives. We do kiss and hug a lot, but with the relatives—not each other. That's not right.

MICHAEL: I hear what you're saying, dear. Let's give it some time and see if things change.

GAYLE: Time? I'll be gone by then. And I don't mean moved. (NARRATES) Michael didn't say anything. I suspect because he didn't have an answer, he just tried to ignore the subject.

The visit to Urgent Care did have one positive aspect. Cousin Carl prescribed some over-the-counter medication for me and within three days I was feeling like myself again.

GAYLE: (NARRATES) Then, on our next date night, things didn't go any better than usual. Our table for two, in a dark corner of MacAbees, turned into a table for eight, with Michael sitting at one end and me at the other. It was a total disaster.

As we drove home from the restaurant, Michael looked over at me and . . .

MICHAEL: (CONCERNED) Honey, you seem troubled. What's wrong?

GAYLE: I don't know. . . . Well, maybe I do.

MICHAEL: What does that mean?

GAYLE: I'm being smothered to death. I'm sixty-three years old, and my family is overwhelming me. . . . (WITH EMPHASIS) I want to move.

MICHAEL: Move? Move where?

GAYLE: A retirement community—far away from Marin County. One where I can gain the independence I've never had.

MICHAEL: (ENTHUSIASTIC) Okay, then let's do it.

GAYLE: You mean it?

MICHAEL: Yes, I do.

MF: "AS TIME GOES BY" BY HENRY MANCINI-THEN FADES OUT

SCENE 2: TODAY, 2025

GAYLE: (NARRATES) And he did. We moved to our retirement community in Placer County, called “Sunrise On The Green,” ten years ago.

On a beautiful, sunny morning, as Michael stood looking out the living room window, I approached him with a smile on my face.
(CHEERFULLY) Good morning, Michael. And happy ten-year anniversary living in our wonderful community.

MICHAEL: What? Happy?

GAYLE: We’re happy most of the time, aren’t we?

MICHAEL: Yeah, if we stay clear of the community politics that can cause you to live on Valium and don’t get too involved with the idiocy of the Homeowners Association.

GAYLE: Well we’re doing that, aren’t we? We’re keeping busy and avoiding . . .

MICHAEL: Sure, I like playing pinochle. Dominoes, not so much.

GAYLE: But we do go out to dinner a lot and go to a play every other month. The community bus trips we take are fun. And our dogs, Winkle and Dinkle, take us for a walk twice daily. They’ve become our personal trainers. We have a full, contented life.

MICHAEL: I think so, Gayle. That’s what we moved here for. It’s the way we pictured retirement, . . . until recently, that is.

GAYLE: (MOANS) All right, until recently.

MICHAEL: Yup. Then something we hadn’t anticipated happened. Our four daughters and their families came to live with us.

GAYLE: Well, not exactly live with us, darling . . .

MICHAEL: Yeah, but close enough.

GAYLE: Okay, maybe so. (NARRATES) Kim, the eldest, our take-charge redhead, moved her family of five just outside our front door seven months ago. Well, maybe not just outside, but only two miles down the road in the housing development called Las Casas Bonitas. Cassie, our second in line, a mischievous blond, dragged her husband and two boys to Placer County two months later and bought a wonderful four-bedroom home only a stone's throw from our backyard. Laurie and Katie, our single and fancy-free twin brunettes, followed about three months later.

MICHAEL: (SOMEWHAT FRUSTRATED) So, now we can't walk the dogs without running into Kim. And Cassie brings our two 'grandboys' to our block all the time to play. She says it's safer here. And we meet Laurie and Katie every time we go to a store or out to dinner.

GAYLE: (PLEADS) But we do love our children, Michael? Don't we?

MICHAEL: Yes, we do, sweetheart. But our four girls visiting us together on a Sunday afternoon sometimes drives me absolutely crazy. This is why we left the Bay Area in search of the peace and quiet we had longed for. However, I guess we didn't move far enough away.

GAYLE: I've got to agree with you, Michael. And don't forget three sets of my cousins, wives with husbands, also followed us to our retirement community, even before our kids arrived.

MICHAEL: I guess when we bought our home, Gayle, we purchased "The Family Plan."

MFX: "WHAT ARE YOU DOING THE REST OF YOUR LIFE" BY MICHEL LEGRAND-THEN FADES OUT

SCENE 3: “THE FAMILY PLAN”—A BROWN PAPER BAG

MICHAEL: (NARRATES) Sunday arrived. Gayle called to me from the kitchen.

GAYLE: Michael, can you come in here? I need help in getting lunch ready for the girls.

MICHAEL: Coming, dear.

SFX: MALE FOOTSTEPS GOING INTO KITCHEN

GAYLE: (FRAZZLED) Get the tray on the counter and put it in the oven. Check the temperature. Make sure it’s reached 350 degrees.

MICHAEL: Oven’s set. Goodies are in . . . Just the girls coming over, or the grandkids too?

GAYLE: It’s Sunday girls get together time. The youngsters are out doing their own thing.

MICHAEL: Why have it here? You part of this girl thing?

GAYLE: No. They wanted to get out of their homes, so I told them to come here. I said I’d prepare some hors d’oeuvres and they could use the great room. Thought maybe you and I could go for a drive.

MICHAEL: A drive? Where?

GAYLE: I don’t know.

MICHAEL: This is our home, not theirs, Gayle.

GAYLE: But they’re our daughters.

MICHAEL: I know. But that’s why we moved here in the first place—to escape and have our freedom.

GAYLE: If we go on the drive, you'll have all the freedom you want.

MICHAEL: But it's not the same.

GAYLE: (FRUSTRATED) I don't know why I even suggested a drive. As usual, I knew you wouldn't go.

SFX: DOORBELL RINGS TWICE

GAYLE: (STRESSED) May I get the door?

MICHAEL: Yeah. You invited them. Go do it. (NARRATES) I followed her into the hall, as she opened the door.

SFX: DOOR OPENS AND CLOSES

MICHAEL: (NARRATES) Our four lovely, but somewhat intrusive, daughters swaggered in. Spotting me in the rear of the entry hall, in unison, they shouted . . .

ALL FOUR GIRLS TOGETHER: (SHOUT) Hello, Daddy.

MICHAEL: (WHINES HALFHEARTEDLY) Hi girls.

KIM: What's wrong, Dad?

MICHAEL: (LETHARGIC) Oh, nothing. Mom wants to go for a drive.

KIM: (ENERGETIC) So? Why don't you go? The weather's beautiful.

MICHAEL: I don't want to go. Just wanted to kick back.

LAURIE: Then just kick back, Dad.

MICHAEL: But I kick back in the great room, and you'll be in there. I thought you girls wanted to be alone.

CASSIE: We did. But you're not going to get in the way. We'll just act as if you're not there. Can you handle that?

MICHAEL: Do I have a choice?

KATIE: (WHIMSICALLY) Nope.

MICHAEL: (NARRATES) So the girls strolled into the great room. The twins crashed on the tan, leather couch. Cassie slid into the matching loveseat and Kim sat in Grandma's old rocker. And me? I sat in the corner by the fireplace on our somewhat aged recliner and stared off into space.

At first, I tried hard to disappear into my own little world, but then the bantering between the "ladies" got louder and louder, so I decided to listen. However, I kept my eyes closed so the girls wouldn't think I was intruding on their special little "chatfest." They ignored me. Must've thought I'd fallen asleep.

KIM: (TAKING CHARGE) Okay, guys, listen up. Let's make this a productive afternoon.

KATIE: (BELLIGERENT) Productive? I thought the object of this soiree was to have fun.

LAURIE: (BELLOWS) And we can't have fun and be productive at the same time? I thought twins were supposed to think alike.

KATIE: (SARCASTIC) If I have to think like you, I think I'll get on the list for a brain transplant.

LAURIE: (SARCASTIC) Before you have a transplant, you have to have a brain to begin with.

KIM: Didn't you guys have this same argument when you were six? Now cut it out!

CASSIE: (COMPLAINING) Oh, come on, this isn't what we came here to do. Let's share some stories about our neighbors. Some of mine are just a bit different.

LAURIE AND KATIE: (TWINS TOGETHER) What do you mean, different?

CASSIE: Well, sort of strange. Especially this one couple. They live three houses down from us.

MICHAEL: (NARRATES) I wasn't sure where this was going, so I let my mind drift, until . . .

CASSIE: (WITH EMPHASIS) They had this very suspicious brown paper bag.

KIM: Brown paper bag? We all have brown paper bags. What's the big deal?

CASSIE: Not like this one you don't.

LAURIE: What's so damn special about this one?

CASSIE: (IN AN EERIE WAY) It was kind of spooky. In big black letters, it read, "**WATCH YOUR BACK OR SOMETHING WILL GET YOU.**"

KIM: Oh, come on! You don't seriously think this is something to be concerned about?

MICHAEL: (NARRATES) Squinting, I noticed Cassie looking my way, so I let my head sink to my chest. After staring for a couple of seconds, she must've concluded I'd fallen asleep, so she went on with her discourse.

CASSIE: (STILL EERIE) I sure do. I heard the neighbor, a big, scary looking guy, say to the small, chubby guy with him that the bag had a spell cast upon it and anyone who possessed it and chose to look inside would become, uh, cursed.

KATIE: (GIGGLING) You're frightening me. I don't think I'll be able to sleep tonight. (PAUSE) But look at Dad. With the racket we're making, he's still sound asleep.

CASSIE: (PUSHY) Katie, don't be so smug when it comes to the eerie brown paper bag. I know I'll never be tempted to look inside, if it appears on my front porch.

KATIE: Well that's you, older sis. Always a chicken.

KIM: Okay, this is getting us nowhere and it's getting late. Any final words before we end what I hope will be the first of many sisterly gatherings, now that we're all settled in our new homes?

LAURIE: Not exactly what I'd expected, but interesting. I'm up for doing it again.

MICHAEL: (NARRATES) The others nodded in agreement as they packed up their belongings and trudged into the hallway, as Gayle came from the kitchen to meet them. They left me languishing in the corner still "fast asleep," or so they thought.

GAYLE: You girls have a good chat session?

CASSIE: Yeah, great, Mom.

MICHAEL: (NARRATES) The others moved their hands as if conducting some imaginary orchestra backing up Cassie's reply. I could see the whole exciting ritual from my seat.

SFX: DOOR OPENING

GAYLE: Well, goodbye girls.

ALL THE GIRLS: Bye, Mom.

KIM: Tell Dad goodbye when he wakes.

LAURIE: He can sleep through anything.

SFX: DOOR CLOSING

SFX: MALE FOOTSTEPS

GAYLE: HI, sleepyhead. You weren't asleep, were you?

MICHAEL: (SNICKERING) No, not at all.

GAYLE: Glad you got to spend an afternoon with your daughters (LAUGHS).

MICHAEL: (SLIGHT PAUSE, NARRATES) Two days later, I opened the door to get the morning paper. There to my surprise sat a large, brown paper bag inscribed with the words, '**WATCH YOUR BACK OR SOMETHING WILL GET YOU.**' It stunned me for a second before I reached for it. Just to be safe, I used caution in opening it. I stuck my hand inside and felt around. My fingers touched something. It felt like an envelope. I pulled it out. Nothing appeared on its face. It wasn't sealed, so I took the flap from within and saw a letter peeking up at me. I unfolded it carefully and perused its contents. My daughters' words flowed forth.

KIM: Dear Daddy—Beware of what you find in a brown paper bag. It can make you crazy, or we, your loving daughters can.

CASSIE: It was obvious to us you hadn't fallen asleep and were aware of our entire ridiculous afternoon conversation. We couldn't think of any other way to tell you how much we love you and how much living near you means to us.

LAURIE: We know your move was meant to allow us to spread our wings and for you to develop your senior lifestyle, but a life apart from you and Mom is not what we want. Mom understands and now maybe you will too.

KATIE: We didn't know how to tell you this to your face, because we knew it went against your plans. So we conjured up a scheme to show you.

KIM: Daddy, we love you more than words can say. And all this comes to you in a brown paper bag. Love—Your daughters, Kim, Cassie, Laurie, and Katie.

MX: "WHAT ARE YOU DOING THE REST OF YOUR LIFE" BY MICHEL LEGRAND-THEN FADES OUT

MICHAEL: (NARRATES) My heart was overwhelmed. I stood and stared off into space. And then . . .

GAYLE: Michael, are you all right?

MICHAEL: (SOFTLY) Yes.

GAYLE: You seem lost.

MICHAEL: (LOVINGLY) I love our daughters, with all my heart, Gayle. (SLIGHT PAUSE) And it's all about what came out of a "Brown Paper Bag." I'll tell you about it later.

GAYLE: No need to.

MICHAEL: Why?

GAYLE: Because I already know.

MICHAEL: What?

GAYLE: Didn't you hear me?

MICHAEL: Huh?

GAYLE: Are you deaf? Do you need hearing aids?

MICHAEL: No way!

GAYLE: Well, I just got off the phone with Myra and she feels cousin Gary certainly does.

MFX: "THE SOUND OF SILENCE" BY SIMON AND GARFUNKEL-
THEN FADES OUT

SCENE 4: "THE FAMILY PLAN"—HUH?

GARY: (NARRATES) I sat at my desk in my den, just staring off into space. My mind drifted back to my walk early this morning. It was a pleasure to stroll through our wonderful neighborhood. Just then Myra stuck her head into my office.

SFX: (NOISE OF CONSTRUCTION WORKERS ON STREET, THEN STOPS)

MYRA: Gary, what's all that noise coming from the street?

GARY: Huh? What noise?

MYRA: Well, turn up your hearing aids.

GARY: (ANNOYED) Stop picking on me Myra. You know damn well I don't have hearing aids. And besides, I don't need them.

MYRA: Then why can't you tell me what the noise is?

SFX: (NOISE OF CONSTRUCTION WORKERS ON STREET, THEN STOPS)

GARY: I can't because I'm working on a project on my iMac and I'm deep in concentration. So I just block out all the awful sounds around me.

MYRA: Then why didn't you answer me when I first called to you from the kitchen? Am I one of those dreadful sounds you manage not to hear?

GARY: Did you say something to me, Myra?

MYRA: (ANNOYED) Just keep doing that and your going to live to regret it. By the way, we need to be at cousin Gayle and Michael's house at six, and its almost five now?

GARY: I thought we weren't going to see them for a while—that they wanted their space. Isn't that why they originally moved here? They certainly were surprised when we followed them.

MYRA: Well, something came up and I convinced Gayle we needed to get together.

GARY: Okay. What came up?

MYRA: Just get ready. You'll find out later.

GARY: All right, give me a couple of minutes to put myself together.

MYRA: Please don't wait till the last minute. I want to be on time. (PAUSE) And wear your hearing aids.

GARY: Yessss, dear. (NARRATES) Now that's not going to happen, because I don't have any. She's always on my back about hearing aids. I hate wearing anything that hangs on my ears, or around my neck, or on my arms. My watch bothers the crap out of me. And I wouldn't wear my wedding ring if I thought Myra would let me. But she'd kill me if I took it off.

MYRA: (CALLS OUT) Gary, I'm ready when you are.

GARY: Huh?

MYRA: Just keep it up.

GARY: (A BIT AGITATED) Okay. I'm going. I'm going. I'm heading to the bedroom now.

SFX: (MALE FOOTSTEPS HEADING TO BEDROOM)

GARY: (NARRATES) Once in the bedroom, I put on my attire for the evening. Looking in the mirror, I marveled at how I'd transformed myself into one handsome dude. Clad in a blue shirt, tan pants, blue jacket, and brown shoes, with my hair well coiffed, I strutted into the living room where Myra sat on the couch reading one of those weird Stephen King novels. She heard me come in and looked up.

MYRA: You ready?

GARY: Don't I look ready?

MYRA: Yeah, guess you look pretty good.

GARY: Well, thanks for the rousing compliment.

MYRA: You're welcome.

GARY: (NARRATES) We locked up the house and walked four houses down the block to Gayle and Michael's. Myra rang the bell.

SFX: DOORBELL RINGS TWICE AND DOOR OPENS

MICHAEL: (PLEASANT, MELODIC VOICE) Welcome, welcome to our humble abode. Please come in.

SFX: DOOR CLOSES

MICHAEL: Just hang your jackets on the coat rack. (SOMEWHAT SARCASTIC) It's so great to see you.

GARY: (A BIT SNIDE) It's nice to see you, too, Michael. (NARRATES) We followed Michael into the living room. I collapsed onto the plush, brown leather couch and Myra parked herself on the loveseat under the window.

MICHAEL: What can I get you to drink?

GARY: Nothing for me right now.

MYRA: (POMPOUS MANNER) I'll have a glass of your finest wine.

MICHAEL: (ALSO POMPOUS) So happy to accommodate you, my dear. A glass of our finest is coming right up.

GARY: (NARRATES) Myra and I sat in our seats, our eyes perusing the room, as we awaited Michael's return. It seemed like hours. Then Michael ambled back in toting a glass of sparkling wine for Myra and a beer for himself. Gayle followed carrying some chips and dip, which she placed on the coffee table.

GAYLE: (MELODIC TONE) Good evening, guys. (SOFTLY) What's up with you, Gary?"

MYRA: (SNOTTY) Gary, Gayle asked you a question. Aren't you going to answer her?

GARY: Huh? What question? Guess I wasn't paying attention. Sorry, Gayle.

GAYLE: Oh, that's all right. I just asked how you've been.

GARY: Fine. Just fine, thank you.

MYRA: Better not ask him anything else, Gayle. Cause he won't hear you anyway. I've been trying to get him to look into getting hearing aids. He insists he doesn't need them. He says he doesn't like the way they feel.

GAYLE: (ANNOYED) God, Gary, why are you so stubborn? I'm wearing hearing aids and I bet you can't see them. And after wearing them for a while, you don't even know they're there.

GARY: But I don't like anything hanging on my body. And, besides, they're not reliable. Most of the people I play poker with on Tuesday night wear them and still don't hear half the things said. Also they complain about the background noise being so loud. So tell me, why should I set myself up for "hearing aid trauma?"

GAYLE: What was that again? I missed the last part of what you said.

GARY: Oh, for heavens sake. That proves my point. Those things don't work.

MICHAEL: (BELLOWS) Don't be so headstrong, Gary. My friend, Warren, wears these new lightweight, almost invisible hearing devices. Says he doesn't even know he has them on.

GAYLE: (EMPHATIC) And his wife told me he doesn't have them on half the time. So who are you to be giving advice?

MICHAEL: Hey, I'm on your side. I'm trying to show Gary why he should get a pair.

GAYLE: Well, you're not doing a very good job . . . Gary, you have to try them before you decide they're not worth wearing.

GARY: Hey, I hear what I want to hear.

MYRA: Is that why you never answer me when I ask you a question?

GARY: Maybe your questions aren't worth answering.

MYRA: Just keep it up, Gary.

GAYLE: Hey guys, just chill. If you had them, you'd be a different person and you'd enjoy life more.

GARY: (NARRATES) What an amazing and annoying evening. The sign posted above the fireplace seemed to read, "This is your chance to convince Gary to get hearing aids, even if he doesn't want them. So do it now." And they did. (SLIGHT PAUSE) Now, the one who irked me the most was Myra, for she doesn't wear them, even though I think they might help her. When all appeared to be going in the wrong direction, Michael became frustrated.

MICHAEL: (YELLING) Aw, leave the guy alone. This was supposed to be a get-together with our relatives, not just a pitch for hearing aids. And besides, I have the solution to Gary's problem.

GARY: Huh? (SHOUTS) What did you say?

MICHAEL: (SHOUTS BACK) I have the solution to . . .

GARY: Oh, stop already, I heard you. Let's drop the subject. How do you feel about the outcome of the election? And what do you think about our new president?

GAYLE: I'd rather discuss hearing aids than the election. At least with hearing aids, you can turn them off when those self-absorbed politicians are speaking. So, Gary, there's one more reason for getting them.

MICHAEL: I thought we decided to give this subject a rest. What else would you guys like to do?

GAYLE: Did you hear about our cousin Walter's wife, Paula?

MYRA: No. What happened, Gayle?

GAYLE: She heard their dog crying in the backyard. It was about 11 p.m. She went outside to check and the door closed behind her. They had installed an automatic locking device on it. She knocked and yelled for almost forty minutes.

GARY: Didn't Walter hear her?

GAYLE: Yeah, but only when he put his book down and got up off the couch to go to the bathroom. Then he saw her outside.

MYRA: That's terrible. Walter must feel awful.

GAYLE: He sure does. Paula won't let him forget it. She's been after him for years to get hearing aids.

MICHAEL: So, now he's going to get them to get her off his back. Right?

GAYLE: Don't know. I would if I did what he did.

GARY: We just can't get off the subject of hearing aids, can we?

MICHAEL: Guess not.

GARY: (NARRATES) But then, believe it or not, we did move on. We chatted about all kinds of things for the next hour, nibbled on some finger food Gayle set out, and afterwards bid Gayle and Michael goodnight.

The next day Myra and I drove to Middleton, fifteen miles from home, to do some shopping. After about two hours of walking in and out of stores, Myra spent close to \$200 and I was exhausted. After all, I had just turned seventy-four a month ago. We went into Moe's Diner and collapsed into a comfortable booth and got something cold to drink.

MYRA: This has been a nice day, Gary.

GARY: Yeah. But I might have to go back to work to cover what you spent. (SURPRISED) Oh my! Myra, look who's in the booth on the other side of the room. And look what he's with.

MYRA: (OVERWHELMED) Holy cow! It's cousin Walter. And she . . . she's at least thirty years younger than he is.

GARY: I've got to give him credit. He does have good taste in women.

MYRA: Cut it out, Gary. This isn't funny. What should we do?

GARY: Nothing. It's none of our business.

MYRA: But what about Paula? She needs to know.

GARY: Well, I'm not going to tell her . . . Oh, my God!

MYRA: What is it, Gary?

GARY: Huh?

MYRA: Didn't you hear me?

GARY: Sure did, but . . .

MYRA: But what?

GARY: They just got up and are heading right toward us.

MYRA: Should we duck and hide?

GARY: (TO MYRA) It's too late, Walter saw me. It's weird, Myra. He doesn't look at all uncomfortable that his liaison has been discovered . . . (TO WALTER) Oh, hello, Walter. How are you?

WALTER: (ACTING CLUELESS) Huh?

YOUNG WOMAN: (SHOUTING) Walter, he asked how you are.

WALTER: Oh, fine, just fine.

GARY: (POLITELY) Are you going to introduce us to your friend, Walter?

WALTER: (ACTING CONFUSED) Uh? What?

YOUNG WOMAN: (YELLING) Walter, he wants to know who I am.

WALTER: Oh, her. This is Lisa . . . my "hearing aid." Goodbye.

GARY: (GASPING) That . . . that's the kind I want. (NARRATES) Myra's face became bright red. If looks could kill, I'd be dead by now.

MF: "THE SOUND OF SILENCE" BY SIMON AND GARFUNKEL-
THEN FADES OUT

GARY: (NARRATES) When Myra and I got home, we said little about what'd happened that afternoon. But when we awoke the next morning . . .

MYRA: Gary, I've got to call Gayle and tell her what happened yesterday.

GARY: Oh, come on, Myra. Just let it be. (NARRATES) Well, she never listens to me. So she reached for the phone and called Gayle.

SFX: PHONE RINGS TWICE

GAYLE: Hello.

MYRA: Gayle, you'll never guess what happened yesterday.

GAYLE: Okay, Myra, what?

MYRA: Well . . . (PAUSE)

GAYLE: (FRUSTRATED) Are you going to leave me hanging, or are you going to tell me?

MYRA: Oh, yes, I'm going to tell you. (NARRATES) So I told her the whole story, especially the part about Walter's "hearing aid." It left her speechless. And then . . .

GAYLE: So, is cousin Walter cheating on Paula? Is there more to the story?

MYRA: I don't know. But I will let you know if I find out. Bye, Gayle.

SFX: SOUND OF PHONE HANGING UP

MFX: "THE SOUND OF SILENCE" BY SIMON AND GARFUNKEL-
THEN FADES OUT

GAYLE: (NARRATES) I hate unfinished stories. So I called Paula. After spending twenty minutes on the phone with her, I hung up, amazed at the outcome of the story. I sat at the kitchen table in awe.

SFX: MALE FOOTSTEPS

MICHAEL: Gayle, are you all right?

GAYLE: What? (PAUSE) Oh, yes. Sit down. I have something to tell you.

MICHAEL: (NARRATES) She recited the whole story, as told to her by Myra. I sat there speechless. (SPEAKS) I feel there is something you're not telling me.

GAYLE: Well, I called Paula to find out the rest of the story. And Walter wasn't cheating on her, as Myra thought.

MICHAEL: If he wasn't cheating, then what was he doing with that woman?

GAYLE: The young woman, Lisa, was a distant cousin on his mother's side. He'd just picked her up at the airport. They stopped for lunch before going home.

MICHAEL: Then why didn't he just introduce her to us as his cousin? Why the hearing aid gag.

GAYLE: Seems she's never met Paula. So Walter and Lisa developed this con together to get Paula off his back about getting hearing aids. The accidental meeting with Gary and Myra made them the perfect audience to rehearse the scam. And it worked well on them.

MICHAEL: Did it work with Paula?

GAYLE: Not as well as it did on Gary and Myra. (PAUSE) By the way, have you had a chance to call cousin Jeremy about the handyman he uses? I have several things I'd like him to do.

MICHAEL: No. Must've slipped my mind.

GAYLE: Do I have to remind you about everything I ask you to do?

MICHAEL: I'll do it right now.

SFX: PHONE RINGS TWICE

JEREMY: Hi, cuz. What's up?

MICHAEL: Just wanted to check in with you guys. See how you're doing. And I have a question.

JEREMY: Well, we're doing good for old folks.

MICHAEL: That's not the question. But, old folks? You're younger than I am.

JEREMY: Isn't everybody? So what's the question?

MICHAEL: You still using that handyman? I think you said his name is Tommy. Gayle and I need someone to fix a couple of things.

JEREMY: No, we're not, but . . .

MICHAEL: But what?

JEREMY: Sit back and listen. I have an interesting story to share with you about him.

MICHAEL: Do we have to do this now?

JEREMY: We're family, cuz. So, yes.

MFX: "LOVE ON THE WEEKEND" BY JOHN MEYER-THEN FADES OUT

SCENE 5: "THE FAMILY PLAN"—WEEKEND PLANS

JEREMY: (NARRATES) Tommy finished the job he'd been doing for me. (BEING FRIENDLY) So Tommy, what are your plans this weekend?

TOMMY: (SQUEALS) Ain't got no weekend plans, Mr. Jeremy.

JEREMY: (NARRATES) The high pitch of his voice rattled me. His name is Tommy True and he's been doing odd jobs for my wife and me for almost three years. Can't remember how our working relationship began. Somehow, he fell into our lives.

Tommy stands five-feet-six-inches tall and weighs no more than one hundred and ten pounds soaking wet. He looks anorexic, but has been known to down two to three Big Macs in one sitting. It appears his metabolism works in his favor.

TOMMY: Want me to do any more stuff, boss?

JEREMY: Don't think so, Tommy.

TOMMY: I'll do anything you want me to—fix things, clean up leaves, or other messes. Anything.

JEREMY: Nothing now, but I'll let you know if I need you.
(NARRATION) I thought hard to come up with something. I felt bad for the guy and wanted to make him feel worthwhile. In my eyes, he was a lost soul and I wanted to help give his life some meaning.

TOMMY: Guess I'll be goin' then. Tell the wife, hi. Check in with you next week.

JEREMY: Okay. Have a nice one. Talk to you Monday or Tuesday.

TOMMY: Yeah, Monday or Tuesday. Sounds good. Remember, if you need it done, I'll do it.

JEREMY: I know, Tommy. If I have something, I'll let you know.
(NARRATES) I watched as this stringy-haired, little man of about sixty-five sauntered off down the driveway. I turned and went into the house.

SFX: DOOR OPENS THEN SLAMS CLOSED

JEREMY: (NARRATES) Melissa sat at the kitchen table reading her latest Stephanie Gaither novel. She heard the door slam behind me and, startled, looked up.

MELISSA: (MURMURS) You send Tommy on his way?

JEREMY: Yeah. I feel for the guy. Hurts me when I can't find something else for him to do. He seems so lost.

MELISSA: He scares me, Jeremy. He's been working for us a long time, but I really know nothing about him. I've never been able to get him to talk about himself. I want to trust him. And I support your trying to help him, but . . .

JEREMY: I know. He's a loner. He doesn't say much to me either. Don't want you to feel afraid. That's why I don't have him come over unless I'm here.

MELISSA: Thank you. I appreciate that. You know, every time I read about something bad or weird happening in the neighborhood, I think maybe Tommy had something to do with it. I know that may not be fair to him, but he frightens the hell out of me.

JEREMY: Why didn't you tell me how uncomfortable he makes you?

MELISSA: Well, in the early days, I thought you'd give him a job or two and he'd disappear. Then you seemed so pleased with your ability to help someone who was down and out, I couldn't bring myself to tell you I'd rather not have him at our house. And as long as you were home when he worked here, I convinced myself I'd be safe.

JEREMY: If having Tommy help us out makes you feel that bad, Melissa, I'll ask him not to come around anymore.

MELISSA: (SOFT) Jeremy, I do think it would be for the best, if he didn't.

JEREMY: Then it's settled. When he comes by next week, I will let him know the work has dried up and he'll have to look elsewhere. I think that will do it (SLIGHT PAUSE).

(NARRATES) Monday arrived, but there was no sign of Tommy. None on Tuesday, either. The week passed and then the next and still no Tommy. I was tempted to seek him out to see if he was all right, but thought it would be better to leave well enough alone.

At the end of the second week since Tommy and I parted company, a letter arrived from the president of our Homeowners Association's governing board. Because these letters more often than not say nothing of consequence, I placed it on my desk in the den and joined Melissa in the kitchen for dinner. As we ate, we talked. And the main topic of conversation—Tommy.

MELISSA: Have you heard anything about Tommy?

JEREMY: Nothing. Guess he's moved on. Strange, but there's no reason to pursue it.

MELISSA: I guess you're right. I do feel better now that he's not here.

JEREMY: I'm glad you do, but I still think about him. I hope he's all right.

MELISSA: So, want anymore chicken? Veggies?

JEREMY: I'm full. Couldn't eat another bite. It was a wonderful dinner.

MELISSA: Well, thank you. Such a compliment could get you breakfast in the morning.

JEREMY: I'll look forward to that. (NARRATES) I excused myself from the table and went into the den. Pulling my chair up to the desk, I noticed the letter at the corner where I put it. I picked it up, opened it, and began to read, "Dear Sunrise On The Green Homeowners Association members. It is with deep sadness, I must share some very distressing news with you."

MELISSA: (CALLING FROM THE KITCHEN) Jeremy, can you take the dog for a walk? He seems anxious. Guess he wants to go out. But I'm in the middle of making the cake for the party tomorrow evening.

JEREMY: (GRUNTS) Okay. Yeah, I'm coming. (NARRATION) I made my way to the kitchen, where Jethro Dog lusted after anything that might drop from the counter. I managed to direct his attention toward me, put a leash on him, and led him out the front door for what I hoped would be a quick evening walk.

When I returned to the house, I unleashed Jethro, went back into the den, and again picked up the association letter. However, before I could continue reading . . .

SFX: PHONE RINGS TWICE

JEREMY: Hello.

NORMA: (A BIT UPSET) Jeremy, have you heard the news about the break-ins?

JEREMY: What break-ins, Norma? (NARRATES) Norma lives around the corner on Ravens Loop. She and her husband, Herb, have become our good friends.

NORMA: (HESSITATES) Uh . . . there have been four in the last two weeks. Guess you didn't hear about them. In each, someone forced open the side garage door and entered the house.

JEREMY: That's pretty scary. What did they take?

NORMA: The news alert said gold and silver pieces of jewelry were taken from all four. Not much else. The thief seems to know when the owners are gone. All the thefts occurred during the day. Police are advising us to install a security door or a bar across the side garage door so thieves can't get in.

JEREMY: (SARCASTIC) Thanks for the good news, Norma. What are you going to do?

NORMA: I think Herb and I will have a security door installed.

JEREMY: Well, I'll talk to Melissa about it and see what she thinks. Thanks for the heads up.

NORMA: You're welcome, Jeremy. This whole thing really frightens me. I thought we lived in a safe community.

JEREMY: Yeah, I thought so, too. Bye Norma.

NORMA: Bye, Jeremy.

JEREMY: (MUTTERS TO HIMSELF) Can it be a coincidence Tommy hasn't shown up at our house the last couple of weeks, the same weeks the four break-ins took place? (NARRATES) Although I didn't believe Tommy could be capable of doing this, as he always has been so nice to me, maybe Melissa's fears are justified.

I left the den and joined Melissa in the living room to watch the seven o'clock news on TV.

MELISSA: Jeremy, you're just in time.

JEREMY: In time for what?

MELISSA: The feature news story is about to come on. It's going to focus on the break-ins in our community. By the way, who was on the phone?

JEREMY: Norma. She called about the break-ins. I'm anxious to find out more about them.

MELISSA: Me, too.

JEREMY: (NARRATES) As I watched, it became clear that the police believed someone working for community residents and who knew their habits had committed the crimes. The story focused on local area handymen and, although it hadn't mentioned Tommy by name, he was one of them. I caught Melissa staring at me.

MELISSA: (WITH SOME AUTHORITY IN HER VOICE) See, I was right to be worried about Tommy hanging around. He's a bit strange. He could've done it.

JEREMY: (MURMURS) I sure hope not. (NARRATES) After the news, Melissa and I watched the movie of the week, "Desperate Measures," on the cable network. When it ended, Melissa shut off the TV, got up off the couch, and stretched.

MELISSA: (YAWN) Ahhhh. You coming to bed?

JEREMY: Yeah, I'll be there in a minute. I want to check something in the den.

MELISSA: What's so important, you have to do it at ten o'clock at night?

JEREMY: There's a letter from the association I've been trying to read. But each time I start, something interrupts me.

MELISSA: Oh, all right. See you in a few. I'll be waiting.

JEREMY: (NARRATES) I walked into the den, pulled out my desk chair, and plopped down. I noticed I had email, so I started to check them. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the yet unread Sunrise On The Green Association letter. So I picked it up and began to read . . .

JEREMY: (NARRATES) Dear Sunrise On The Green Homeowners Association members. It is with deep sadness, I must share some very distressing news with you. Nathan Thomas Truman, a wealthy, eccentric millionaire and philanthropist, died in his sleep on October 4, 2024. (BLURTS) Wow! That afternoon was the last time I saw Tommy. What a coincidence.

MELISSA: (CALLS OUT FROM THE BEDROOM) Jeremy, what are you yelling about? Are you all right? Come to bed.

JEREMY: (YELLS BACK) Nothing to worry about. I'm fine. After I finish reading the letter from the association, I'll be there.

JEREMY: (NARRATES) The letter centered on Nathan Truman's methods of giving. It stated he would work for and befriend people in the housing developments that made up our city, including our own. After getting to know them, especially their dreams and desires, if he believed in what they wanted to do, an anonymous monetary gift would be received in the mail. No return address appeared on the plain white envelope and the enclosed check bore an unreadable signature followed by the words, "The True Believer's Foundation." Once he completed his mission, he never again appeared at the recipient's home, moving on to yet another "project."

It further stated that at least six checks, in varying amounts, had been received by members of our community. It also indicated that Truman had been a very private person. To the knowledge of our association's governing board president, no pictures of this wonderful gentleman, who didn't live or dress as if he had money, existed.

My eyes started to close. I placed the letter on the desk and made my way down the hallway to the bedroom and got ready for bed.

MELSSA: So, you took a long time getting here. Interesting letter? Learn anything more about our suspected criminal, Tommy?

JEREMY: I'm not sure. The letter wasn't about the break-ins. However, it did leave me with a lot of unanswered questions.

MELISSA: About what?

JEREMY: I'd rather not discuss it now.

MELISSA: (RAISES VOICE) Why not?

JEREMY: (EMPHATIC, SOMEWHAT ANNOYED) I said not now, Melissa. Let's get some sleep. Maybe we'll find out more in the morning. Good night.

MELISSA: (RELUCTANT) Okay. Good night.

JEREMY: (NARRATES) I tossed and turned all night, awakening many times. The thought kept running through my mind—*Tommy True, Nathan Thomas Truman, "The True Believers Foundation."* No, they don't go together. It had to be one big coincidence.

I awoke Saturday morning to bright sunshine peeking through the partially open bedroom blinds. Melissa's beautiful singing flowed from the kitchen.

MELISSA: (SINGING) Oh what a beautiful morning,
 Oh what a beautiful day,
 I've got a wonderful feeling,
 Everything's going my way.

JEREMY: (NARRATES) After brushing my teeth and dressing, I went to the den and began to work on my favorite weekend project—The West Valley Youth Center.

MELISSA: (CALLS FROM THE KITCHEN) Jeremy, breakfast is ready. And I want to hear more about your thoughts about Tommy's involvement in the break-ins.

JEREMY: I'll be there in a couple of minutes.

MELISSA: (IMPATIENT) Try to hurry up. Everything's going to get cold.

JEREMY: Okay. (NARRATES) The Youth Center has been my baby since I retired a little over five years ago. I work on it every weekend, preparing to meet and talk with people during the week about the center and its value to the community, to enlist volunteers, and to secure funding. I speak to everybody about it, that is, everybody who will listen, even Tommy, who had a peculiar interest in my undertaking. I remember him saying . . .

TOMMY: Boss, how much does it cost to run your center? Bet it's a lot of money.

JEREMY: About \$250,000, Tommy. More than I have.

TOMMY: That's a real fortune, boss. A big bunch of money. Will it be hard to get?

JEREMY: Yes. It won't be an easy task to reach my goal. (NARRATES) Coming from a man who seemed to need handouts to survive, this conversation surprised me. It also seemed strange our discussions on this topic lasted longer than the total of all the other conversations we had over the years.

SFX: DOORBELL RINGS TWICE

JEREMY: (NARRATES) My concentration interrupted, I went to the door and tugged it open, as it sometimes sticks.

SFX: DOOR OPENING

JEREMY: (NARRATES) Our mailman, Dexter, dressed in his summer, khaki shorts smiled at me.

DEXTER: (SLOWLY) Morning, Mr. Connors. Nice day, isn't it?

JEREMY: Good morning, Dext. Sure is a great day.

DEXTER: Got a letter for you, sir. Sorry it's a little late. Got lost at the post office. It appears the stamp fell off, so you got some postage due. Seventy-three cents, to be exact.

JEREMY: Here you are Dexter. (NARRATES) I handed him a dollar and received my change.

DEXTER: Thank you, Mr. Connors.

JEREMY: Have a good day, Dext.

DEXTER: You, too, sir.

SFX: DOOR CLOSES

JEREMY: (NARRATES) I ambled toward the den, holding a nondescript, plain white envelope addressed to me. I sat down on the couch across from my desk and stared at it, somewhat afraid to expose the contents. Taking a deep breath, I tore open the flap uncovering the top of a check. Flustered, I removed it from the envelope. (YELLS) Oh, my God!

MELISSA: (SHOUTS FROM THE KITCHEN) Jeremy, what's wrong?

JEREMY: (EXCITED, BUT CONFUSED) I . . . I just got a check . . . for \$250,000.

MELISSA: You what?

JEREMY: You heard me.

SFX: FOOTSTEPS

JEREMY: (NARRATES) Melissa appeared in the doorway. I tried hard to contain the emotions rumbling within me.

MELISSA: You're as white as a sheet. You look like you've just seen a ghost.

JEREMY: Maybe I have. (NARRATES) My hands trembled. I lost control of the envelope. As it floated to the ground, something fell from it. I leaned down and picked up what appeared to be a photograph.

MELISSA: What's that?

JEREMY: (SURPRISED) It . . . it's the photo of Tommy I took almost three years ago. I remember when I showed it to him. He pleaded with me . . .

TOMMY: I need to have it. I look a sight and nobody should ever see it. Make sure you erase the picture from your camera. Please, boss.

MELISSA: Well, why did he send it to you now?

JEREMY: I don't know. But there's a note on the back of the photo. It's dated October 4, 2024.

MELISSA: What does it say?

JEREMY: Oh my, it says . . .

TOMMY: (SAME SQUEAKY VOICE) You have always been my friend. You treated me like someone who mattered. Now you can make your "Weekend Plans" a reality. Please remember me. Respectfully yours, "Tommy True," aka "Nathan Thomas Truman."

MF: "LOVE ON THE WEEKEND" BY JOHN MEYER-THEN FADES OUT

MICHAEL: Wow! Jeremy, that's an amazing story. How long did it take you to make it up?

JEREMY: What are you talking about? It's the honest truth. Don't you read our Homeowners Association letters?

MICHAEL: Hell no! I just toss them in the garbage.

JEREMY: Love you, cuz. But I wonder about you. You have to live in today's world—stay connected. Otherwise, . . .

MICHAEL: (CUTS JEREMY OFF) Hey, Jeremy, someone's beeping in. I've gotta go. Talk to you soon, . . . maybe. Bye.

GAYLE: You off the phone, Michael?

MICHAEL: Yeah.

GAYLE: So did you get the name of the handyman from Jeremy?

MICHAEL: No, he lost contact with him.

GAYLE: Why? Did he leave town? Retire?

MICHAEL: No, he died.

GAYLE: Oh, my! That's sad.

MICHAEL: (CHUCKLES) But Jeremy's rich.

GAYLE: He's what? How?

MICHAEL: I'll tell you later. Remember, we're playing cards tonight with your other cousin, Walter, the cheater.

GAYLE: But he didn't cheat on Paula. I already told you that.

MICHAEL: Then why's he coming by himself? And you know he's always looking at my cards.

GAYLE: Paula's at their son's house in the Bay Area. Since she's out-of-town, Walter didn't want to be alone. And, yes, you're right, he does cheat at cards.

MFX: "IT'S ALL IN THE GAME" BY TOMMY EDWARDS-THEN
FADES OUT

SCENE 6: "THE FAMILY PLAN"—It's All In The Cards

MICHAEL: Cousin Walter is arriving at 5:30 pm, Gayle. It's already 4:30 pm and we haven't eaten. (NARRATES) I looked at her and . . . (JOKINGLY) By the way, honey, what are we having for dinner?

GAYLE: I hope you're joking. I asked you what you wanted this morning and you didn't give me an answer. So I'm having a bowl of soup. You're on your own.

MICHAEL: No problem. I have a couple of TV dinners in the fridge to choose from. I'll be fine.

GAYLE: (SARCASTIC) I'm sure you will, darling.

MICHAEL: (NARRATES) We each prepared our own gourmet delight and chowed down, with little conversation. Gayle finished first, stood up, and rattled off a list of chores I needed to complete in the next fifteen minutes before Walter arrived.

GAYLE: Michael, wipe off the table, get out the pinochle cards and the cube that shows the suit we bid in, and find a decent score pad. The one we used last time we played was too small. Then turn on the music. You forget to do it almost every time we play and the quiet drives me crazy. I'm going to put myself together. Then I'll put out the snacks.

MICHAEL: (SNIDE MANNER) Yes, dear. (NARRATES) With everything ready, I paced back and forth in our entry hall waiting for Walter's car to pull up in front of the house. As I peered through the dining room window, it came to abrupt halt. He rolled out on the driver's side and made his way to our front door. I opened it and . . .

WALTER: (Frightened) I think I was being followed.

MICHAEL: Followed?

WALTER: (MUMBLES) Yeah.

MICHAEL: By what?

WALTER: A suspicious black SUV. Maybe we should call the cops.

MICHAEL: Why? (NARRATES) Before he could reply, Gayle joined us at the door.

GAYLE: Michael, why is Walter standing outside?

MICHAEL: He says he was followed by a mysterious black SUV. He thinks we should call the cops.

GAYLE: (IGNORING MICHAEL) Walter, please come inside.

WALTER: All right. But aren't you worried? The Homeowner's Association bulletin said we should watch out for suspicious cars that don't look like they belong here.

GAYLE: Could you see who was in the car?

WALTER: I think there were two of them. They were wearing hoodies.

GAYLE: I don't see an SUV out there. Where'd they go? I think you're blowing this out of proportion, Walter.

WALTER: Maybe so, but we've got to be careful.

SFX: DOOR CLOSES

MICHAEL: (NARRATES) I ushered Walter into the kitchen where we were going to play a three-handed version of pinochle.
(ADDRESSING WALTER) What can I get you to drink, Walter?

WALTER: Nothing too strong. I need to have a clear mind, so I can win tonight.

MICHAEL: Win? You've got to be kidding. The only way you're going to do that is by cheating.

WALTER: (SMILING) Well, I am pretty good at that.

MICHAEL: (NARRATES) With drinks in place and all seated, Gayle picked up the cards and began to deal. But before all the cards were dealt, there was a knock on the door, then a second knock, then a third, and then a fourth.

WALTER: (SCREAMS) I told you that big black SUV was dangerous.

MICHAEL: How do you know that?

WALTER: What else could it be?

MICHAEL: I'm going to go to the door to find out.

WALTER: (YELLS) Don't do it! They'll get you!

MICHAEL: (NARRATES) He grabbed my arm. I pulled away from him and headed to the door. Turning on the porch light, I slowly turned the door knob. Sometimes Walter could be a nut job, but I was going to be cautious, just in case he was right.

MICHAEL: (NARRATES) I pulled the door back and stood staring at not one, not two, but four people in black hoodies, wearing those masks we wore during the COVID-19 scare. (WHIMPERS) What do you want? We're old people. Just leave us alone.

KIM: (ACTING AS THE FIRST GANGSTER—MUTTERS) We can't do that.

MICHAEL: Why not? We haven't done anything?

LAURIE: (ACTING AS THE SECOND GANGSTER—MUMBLES) Oh, yes you have.

CASSIE: (ACTING AS THE THIRD GANGSTER—GRUMBLES) So just keep quiet and do what we say.

MICHAEL: (SHAKING AND MOANING) Or what?

KATIE: (ACTING AS THE FOURTH GANGSTER) You don't want to know.

KIM: (ACTING AS THE FIRST GANGSTER) Where are your two partners?

MICHAEL: How do you know there are two other people here?

CASSIE: We know everything about you. That's why you're our target.

MICHAEL: (NARRATES) I didn't know what to say. I stood there in silence. And then . . .

GAYLE: (BEHIND MICHAEL—OUT OF SIGHT, CHANTS) Should we make him beg for forgiveness?

MICHAEL: (NARRATES) But it wasn't one of the intruders speaking? It was coming from behind me. I spun around, and there to my amazement I saw Gayle and Walter, with broad smiles on their faces.

GAYLE: Now aren't you sorry you didn't let me invite the girls over to play cards with us this evening?

MICHAEL: You set this up to get back at me, Gayle?

GAYLE: No, we set this up. You can't always have it your way dear.

MICHAEL: But . . .

GAYLE: No buts. The girls were going to get together this evening, since their husbands and children were busy, but they didn't know what they wanted to do. When I asked you if I could make our card game a larger family thing tonight, you said, "No way." Well, after that, it all fell into place.

KIM: (GIGGLING) Yes, Dad, it was the best plan we could think of. You're our wonderful father, but . . .

LAURIE: (GRINNING) But, family comes first. Not just one of us, but all of us.

CASSIE: (SMILING) So, cousin Walter, known for his cheating ways, helped us to save you from cheating yourself.

MICHAEL: (IN DISBELIEF) Cheating myself?

KATIE: (CHUCKLING) Yes, from the love, we, your four wonderful daughters, want you to have.

MICHAEL: (WHISPERS) I love you too.

WALTER: (YELLS) So what are we waiting for, let's play cards.

MF: "IT'S ALL IN THE GAME" BY TOMMY EDWARDS-THEN
FADES OUT