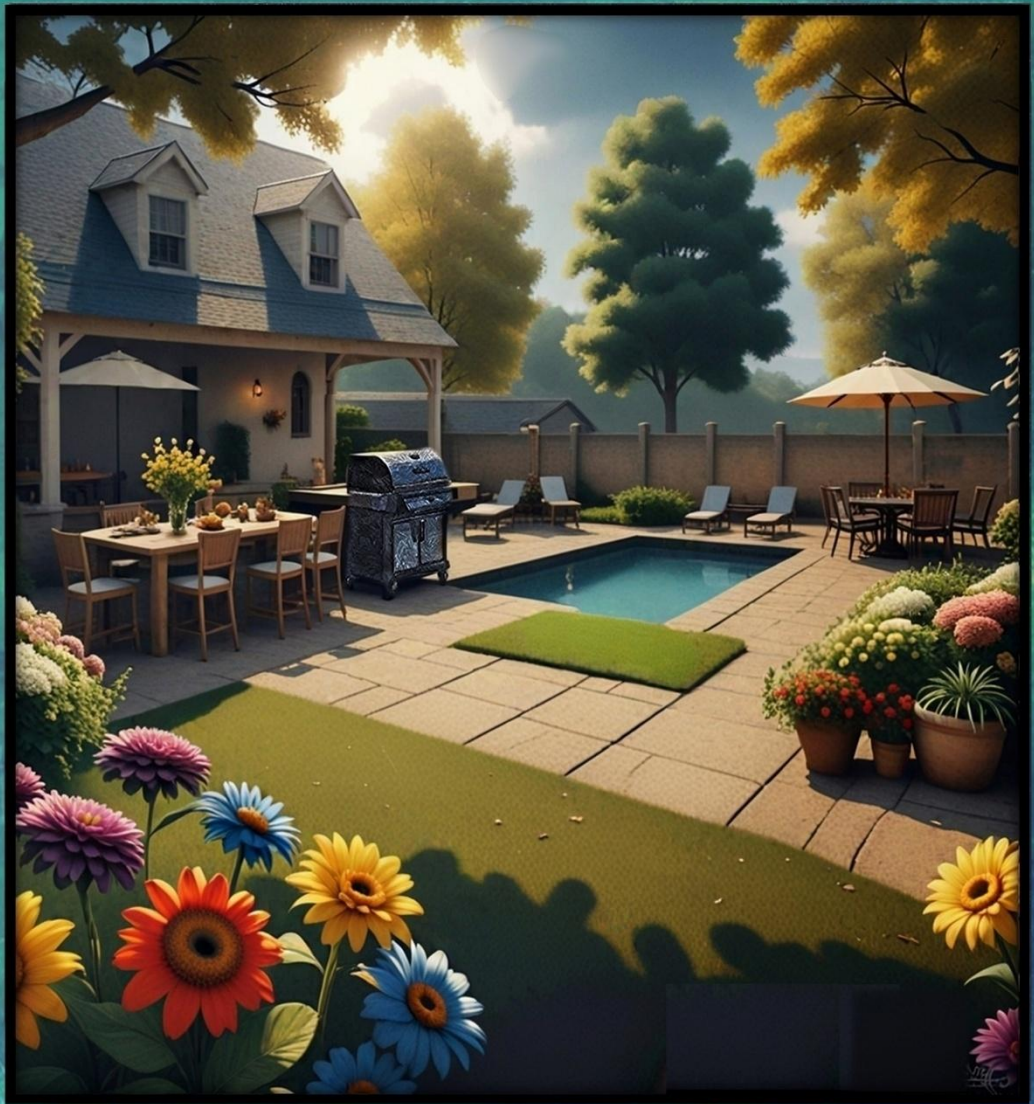


# A Couple's Dilemma



a play by

*Gordon Blitz*

**Cast of Characters:**

**Stan** - straight man, 45 years old, blond and blue eyes

**Ellen** - straight woman, 40 years old, brunette

**Keith** – African-American gay man, 40 years old, thin

**Henry** – Caucasian gay man, 45 years old, brown hair, muscular

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## SCENE 1

*When the lights come up, wedding music is heard. STAN and ELLEN are dressed as bride and groom and have their backs to the audience. STAN has blonde hair and blue eyes. ELLEN is a brunette. Each slips a ring on their partner's finger. Stan turns around and addresses the audience.*

STAN

I can't believe how lucky I am. I never thought I would ever be able to say 'I love you' and yet with Ellen it happens almost every day! I think to myself, 'Is that me saying those three words?' My folks never told me that they loved me. It was unspoken. I just *assumed* they loved me. Isn't that what parents are supposed to do even if they don't say it? I had no idea that it was normal to say it out loud.

In Ellen's family, it's spoken all the time. The end of a phone call always includes 'love you!' I often wondered if it has less meaning because how easily it's used. I mean, to me saying 'I love you' is a big deal. It's a commitment, right? And don't get me started about *being* in love versus I *am* in love. Or then there is that difference between romantic love versus love between friends. And between family; sisters and brothers, parent and child.

I'm glad that we decided not to write and read vows. We know how we feel about each other. There's no need to reiterate it to the world. And I went along with Ellen's idea of reading a passage from the Bible. It will make her parents happy, and that's important. I don't want her to have any regrets about marrying me. I want this to be a fresh start for both of us.

STAN

That's another great thing about Ellen. She never wanted to know about my history. You know, for the girls that I dated? I didn't want to know anything about their past either. It's for the best.

You have to understand that when we started dating, I was worried that she would be analyzing me because that's her profession; she's a Marriage and Family Therapist. But she told me, and I believe her, that she turns off that part of her brain when she's not working. And it's true! Not that I know that much about therapy, I've never been, but I could probably tell if that's how she was talking to me. She never talks down to me. When I told my friends about her, they joked that we would never need couples therapy!

Oh, god; here comes one of the most important parts of a Jewish wedding. You know, I never realized how much antisemitism there is in the world. I mean, why would I? It's a good thing her parents are Reform. That means there aren't too many things that I need to remember to do. Okay, I get to smash the glass under my foot now. I just hope it breaks into a thousand pieces. I want to do this right!

*STAN turns back to facing the backdrop. A small white cloth wrapped around a glass is on the floor and STAN stamps on it as we hear the sound of breaking glass. STAN and ELLEN kiss. ELLEN turns and addresses the audience.*

ELLEN

Oh, I'm a married lady now! Just like Streisand sings in *Funny Girl*: 'Sadie, Sadie, married lady!' And Stan is perfect! You know how they say Jewish men make the best husbands. It's really true! He is such a *mensch*.

ELLEN

He treats me like a princess. Not in a bad way. You know, trying to put me on a pedestal, and me never being able to live up to that. He says he *loves* my flaws. And I have a handful -- like snoring when I sleep and not being able to cook. My parents love him and they never liked any of the guys I dated. It goes without saying that I never brought home any boys who weren't Jewish. So many of them were airheads.

And Stan's *so* successful as a financial advisor. He has like a hundred clients! I wonder how many patients *I'm* going to have when I finish getting my therapy hours. And I've been so good about not trying to analyze him. I have to keep telling myself, 'Stan is not one of my patients.' At first, he didn't want to handle my parents' money; worried what would happen if they lost money. But I told him not to worry about it. And actually, they've done so well with the investments he suggested that it would have been easy for them to pay for the wedding. Even so, he wanted to pay for it *himself*. He is so generous. I couldn't believe how much money he pledged during High Holidays for our temple.

Oh, and another thing! I'm glad we're on the same page about children. No pressure to rush into me getting pregnant. Only when we are *both* ready. I do want them, but it has to be the right time. I have to *really* want them. Thank goodness, we live in a state with reproductive rights.

Oh, god! There are so many people here. I wish we would have had a

ELLEN

smaller wedding, but with all of Stan's clients, and my parents having so many friends; well, it just started adding up.

You know, I *did* write vows even though we weren't planning on saying any during the wedding ceremony. Good thing, because every time I tried to say them out loud, I started to cry. One of the lines that I wrote triggered tears. 'Stan has given me a pearl necklace of three strands. The colors of the strands are gold for God, white for the bride and purple for the groom. They are all braided together with our deep abiding love.'

*As she finishes, STAN turns around facing the audience. They hold hands and walk into the audience. As they pass each person, they thank them and shake their hands, as if they are guests at their wedding.*

*Lights dim.*

## SCENE 2

*When the lights come up, wedding music is heard. An African-American man, KEITH, and a Caucasian man, HENRY, are dressed in matching tuxedos and have their backs to the audience. Each slips a ring on their partner's finger. KEITH turns around and addresses the audience.*

### KEITH

Last night I was thinking about all the firsts that this marriage represents. I tried to put them in order. First, interracial and second, interfaith are probably the biggest. How could I forget about this being the first same-sex marriage in either of our families. Quite amazing! And what normally should have been a surprise is that my parents and Henry's parents are totally supportive. I guess when you accept that your sons are gay, anything else isn't a big deal.

I just wish my brother were alive to be here. I would have chosen him as my best man. Hard to believe it's been ten years since he died. Such a crazy accident, unusual for a person of color. Melvin was a swimmer, a water polo player and a surfer. A triple threat for an African-American! Whenever he was in a pool or in the ocean, he stood out. I guess you could say he was the first person in our family to excel in water sports! We were one of the first families that had a swimming pool in our backyard. He was just unlucky that while body surfing, he tackled an out-of-control wave and hit his head becoming paralyzed from the neck down. And the worst part was that Timothy did not want to stay on life support. It devastated our parents. They refused to understand his decision. They kept telling him, 'Look at all the people that have suffered the same injury, and yet

KEITH

they live productive lives. You have a brain! Think about what you could accomplish. You can still teach acting and direction.' But they couldn't change his mind. This wasn't any kind of quality of life that he wanted. I didn't like the idea of assisted suicide either, but it was his decision.

Every time I'm in a play, I think about him. I realize that I would have never had as much success as an actor if it weren't for him. We surely didn't inherit any of that talent from our parents! And if I hadn't been an actor, I might never have met Henry. Henry was my biggest fan. He was like a *Stage Door Johnny*. Waiting for me after a show. Telling me how much he loved my performance. We make a great duo. Well, an unusual pair; the actor and the nutritionist. With his steady income as a nutritionist and my up and down salary as an actor, it's a perfect match. And somehow me being Catholic and Henry being Jewish makes us compatible too. And for good measure, I'm a Gemini and he's a Taurus; not that I believe in astrology, but it couldn't hurt. And thank goodness we never talk about politics. That would be an unnecessary time bomb.

*KEITH turns back and faces the backdrop. A small white cloth wrapped around a glass is on the floor and KEITH stamps on it as we hear the sound of breaking glass. KEITH and HENRY kiss. HENRY turns and addresses the audience.*

HENRY

This whole event feels so surreal to me. I can't believe how I've turned my life around. Damn, he is so handsome! No wonder he keeps getting stage roles. I'm glad I didn't listen to my friends who said that I was only a



## HENRY

sugar daddy; that Keith was a struggling actor looking for support. But he doesn't struggle. Sure, he doesn't make as much money as I do as a nutritionist, but he works all the time. If he's not working, he doesn't sit in front of the television watching sports or the news.

He has chores that we've mutually agreed upon; keeping the house clean, food shopping, and laundry. We share in the cooking. No surprise since I'm a nutritionist. The thing with Keith is that if I'm not cooking, he eats all the sugar, sodium and fat that he wants. He doesn't follow the doctrine I tell my patients – 'you are what you eat!' The only rule that Keith has is, 'Everything in moderation. That's the key. My aunt lived 'til she was one hundred; never got sick and never watched what she ate.'

Keith also believes in food diversity. Keep things interesting, just like sex! I'm glad we've been dating for five years and lived together for two of those years. We've worked out all the kinks that seem to sabotage the other couples we know. Our saving grace is that we never talk about religion or politics. Otherwise, everything else is an open book -- especially sex! We're always checking in with each other; role playing, *did that feel good, should we do it in the morning or the evening?* We actually love making compromises. At first, I would worry about some guy hitting on him. When we first met, I felt I was out of his league, but he assured me that in his eyes I was a ten! Well, maybe a *soft* ten.

HENRY

Another thing I'm thankful for is Keith is not judgmental. He doesn't hold grudges. I see that with his friends. He had one friend who was in jail for manslaughter. Damn, I hate that word. Keith not only went and visited the guy, but he became a big brother to his son while the man was incarcerated. But now after five years, I trust him implicitly.

And you know what else? We both want to have children, and we made an agreement that we would share in that responsibility. That's the only way that would happen. Just because he doesn't have a steady job per se doesn't mean that I would expect him to be some sort of stay-at-home "mom." Every day I realize how lucky we are to be living in the 21st century. A black and white same-sex couple wanting to adopt a child or maybe even use a surrogate. It doesn't get any better than that!

*As he finishes, KEITH turns around facing the audience. He holds hands with HENRY and they walk into the audience. As they pass each person, they thank them and shake their hands, as if they are guests at their wedding.*

*Lights dim.*

### SCENE 3

*Ten years later. Backyard patio with a barbecue and with a pool offstage. STAN, ELLEN, HENRY and KEITH are sitting on lounge chairs. STAN and ELLEN are wearing bathing suits. HENRY and KEITH are wearing T-shirts and shorts. Half the stage is the backyard. The other half is the kitchen. All have books that they are reading. HENRY - Secret City: The Hidden History of Gay Washington, KEITH - How to Fight Anti-Semitism, ELLEN - A Little Life, and STAN - Goodbye Columbus. ELLEN puts her book down and stands up.*

ELLEN

Do you realize we all have our noses in books? Doesn't anyone want to go swimming? That was the whole point of having you guys over. Trying out our fresh-off the presses swimming pool. Did you even bring your bathing suits?

HENRY

Yes, we're actually wearing them under our shorts. This is the major heat of the day. I don't want to get sunburned.

ELLEN

What about you, Keith? What's *your* excuse?

KEITH

I'm going to use the same *sunburned* excuse. I know it's lame, but I don't want to get blacker than I am.

HENRY

He loves telling people that!

KEITH

Well it's true! The sun can be just as damaging for people like me.

ELLEN

Okay! you're probably right. You know, I feel like this is a play date for us just like it would be for our kids. I'm glad they're at sleep-away camp together. That way they won't feel

ELLEN

alone. And they can look after one another. I know how it is at camp.

KEITH

I wouldn't know. Never went to camp. But I agree. It's a perfect match. We each have girls -- both aged eight, and both boys are ten. And we're all Jewish.

STAN

And our kids are all adopted, too! How cool is that?

HENRY

Actually I don't consider our children adopted. We used a surrogate.

KEITH

But, don't forget we're all Jewish!

ELLEN

Keith, I thought you were Catholic.

KEITH

Yes but I feel like I could pass as a Jew around you guys.

STAN

That would be a real trick!

HENRY

You know, he's right. He sometimes knows more about the rituals and traditions than I do.

KEITH

Remember, I played Larry Kramer in that all-black revival of *A Normal Heart*. I had to do a lot of research.

STAN

Okay you can be our token Jew.

HENRY

And there's another thing we have in common. We're all in our forties. It's nice having another couple around. We've had so much trouble finding people who we both like with children around the same age.

STAN

Same with us. I think initially we weren't sure we had that much in common with you guys.

KEITH

You mean because I don't like sports?

HENRY

We were worried when we met you, too. Let's face it, you're straight; not that there's anything wrong with that!

ELLEN

Oh, you sound like a Seinfeld episode!

*They laugh.*

KEITH

I bet you think we're interracial. Henry, did you know that? You're a man, and you look just like me. People even think we're brothers when we go on vacation. They don't know what else to call us. Two men together. You'd think they could tell we're married because we both wear rings.

HENRY

Don't they always say all men are brothers?

ELLEN

You guys are impossible!

HENRY

Wait a minute. Is it because we're vegan! Oh, no! Keith, I knew they were going to make us eat flesh!

*They all laugh.*

STAN

Just forget it. It doesn't matter what we originally thought about each other. Hey, guys, I'm thirsty. Wanna' try my blackberry brandy drink.

*KEITH, HENRY and ELLEN shout:*

Yes!

*STAN goes into the kitchen to get the drinks.*

HENRY

Ellen, it looks like you're getting burned. Let me put some sunblock on you.

ELLEN

Only if you include a massage.

*ELLEN hands the lotion to HENRY and he begins massaging it onto her back, and when he starts on her chest, she stops him.*

HENRY

What's wrong? Are you afraid Stan is going to get jealous?

*STAN comes back into the backyard holding three drinks. He hands them out.*

STAN

I didn't say a word.

ELLEN

I'm sensitive around that area. I have lumpy breasts.

KEITH

Eeww! Too much information!

ELLEN

Sorry. I thought you guys could handle anything.

HENRY

Are you worried about cancer?

ELLEN

No. According to my doctor, there's only a slight risk.

KEITH

That's what my mother died of. Just make sure your doctors are on top of things, okay?

*Each takes a sip of their blackberry brandy drink licking their lips showing satisfaction. HENRY begins massaging ELLEN's shoulders as she starts moaning.*

STAN

What are you doing to her? Sounds like she's having an orgasm!

ELLEN

Keep at it, Henry. Maybe it will convince Stan to massage me like that.

*They all laugh. After HENRY finishes with ELLEN, he walks over to STAN.*

HENRY

Okay, Stan, it's your turn. Are you ready for my magic fingers?

STAN

Well, this will be a first; getting a massage from a gay man. Keith, are you okay with this?

KEITH

Sure! I want to see if Henry gets you to make those same orgasmic sounds as your wife.

ELLEN

Yes. That will be something. Who knows? Maybe you swing both ways, honey!

*As HENRY uses lotion and massages STAN's shoulders, STAN is mute.*

HENRY

Are you enjoying this, Stan?

STAN

You'll never know.

HENRY

Wait a minute. I hear some growling. I *knew* I could turn you on.

STAN

Sorry to disappoint you, but that's my stomach wanting to eat.

ELLEN

That reminds me. I'm getting hungry, too. Keith, why don't you help me in the kitchen getting the burgers ready. We need to label which ones are gluten free, vegan, vegetarian, chicken or red meat! Ah! I'm tired already! Stan, why don't you get the barbecue going. I'd like to roast the potatoes and that's going to take some time.

*KEITH and ELLEN leave the backyard. Lights dim on the backyard and come up in the kitchen.*

KEITH

Thank you for saving me while Stan and Henry get into their sports addiction. It feels like it's getting worse. It used to be just basketball and baseball, but now it's *tennis*!

ELLEN

At least those are shorter seasons compared to football. I've put limits on the amount of hours Stan watches his sports on TV.

KEITH

I tried that with Henry, but I found him watching the stuff on his iPhone!

ELLEN

Funny, I thought gay men weren't into sports. I guess the world is changing. You can join the sports widows club!



KEITH

I suppose there could be worse habits. But anyway, there *is* something I wanted to talk to you about privately. You know, we made a pact that we wouldn't talk about politics or religion, but recently I'm afraid I can't hold back.

ELLEN

I know, those can be lightning rods for couples, but what's going on with you two?

KEITH

It's raising the kids. I want them to have some sort of religion. Henry doesn't seem that interested, and when I bring it up, I've said, 'Well, if you don't care about them being brought up Jewish, then why don't I start taking them to church?' I think having God in your life is important.

ELLEN

I agree.

KEITH

So, I don't know if I should pressure Henry on this point. Oh, and there's another thing. When Henry's parents died within six months of each other, Henry never mentioned any higher power or spiritual help that he needed. And when I said things like, 'Wouldn't it be nice to go to the LGBTQ synagogue? If we had been involved with that synagogue, the rabbi could have spoken at the funeral,' all Henry said was, 'I don't believe in organized religion.'

I don't know how things are for you, Ellen, but religion is an important part of my life. When my brother died, I could not have gotten through the depression I was feeling without

KEITH

having faith in God. It seems like that's the only way to make sense out of chaos or things that we just don't understand.

ELLEN

But I have to tell you, I also wonder about Stan. He *never* talks about God. Yes, he says he wants our kids to be *bar* and *bat mitzvah*, but otherwise, he never suggests going to temple. Not even on the High Holidays. Our family is very Reform. You might even call us *secular* Jews, but in reality, we have a strong faith. You would definitely describe us as being *cultural* Jews.

KEITH

What's that?

ELLEN

Being proud of your heritage, but not religious. But it's interesting that you and I both have the same dilemma. I was thinking this has something to do with Stan's upbringing, but he hardly mentions his childhood or even his parents. They died a few years after we got married, and he was an only child. What about Henry? Do you have any clues?

KEITH

Same issue. Nothing about his past. And I thought that was a gay thing to not bring up past lovers.

ELLEN

Unfortunately, it's rampant.

*They both laugh.*

KEITH

Look at them. I wonder what Henry and Stan are talking about. They seem pretty animated.

ELLEN

Well, maybe they're bitching about *us*. I think it's good that they're friends. Stan never mentions *friends* except for people he knows at work. And like I said before, we hadn't really found a couple to be friends with until we met you guys.

KEITH

It's the same with Henry not having any friends. I worry that he has no one to bounce ideas off of. I mean, it's nice to know that we're not only lovers but also good friends.

ELLEN

That's the way marriage is *supposed* to be. Let's give them their time before we go back out there. Oh, by the way, I've been trying to recruit people to volunteer at the Democratic Club. The election is coming up, and it's important that a Democrat gets elected. We could really use your help.

*KEITH looks uncomfortable.*

KEITH

Uh, . . . We better check up on the guys.

*Lights dim in the kitchen and then lights come up in the backyard. STAN is standing over the barbecue while HENRY is standing beside him. STAN lights the charcoal briquettes.*

STAN

Did you see the game last night? I couldn't believe who won. I was screaming!

HENRY

Well, that's because your team won!

STAN

How are things going with you guys? I heard that you separated for a while.

HENRY

Nah, not really. Keith had an opportunity to understudy the lead in the Broadway production of the play, *Powell*, about Colin Powell, but he had to sign a six-month contract. We talked it out and decided that he should go for it because it was a once-in-a-lifetime chance.

STAN

How did that go?

HENRY

Not too bad. Of course, we had to hire a nanny to take care of the kids. I couldn't handle them on my own. I actually think it was a good thing for our relationship. Things had been getting a little stale, and this spiced it up a bit. Keith got a chance to perform the role in Sunday matinees, and I got a chance to see him. He was fabulous if I do say so myself. So believable playing an African-American Republican.

STAN

That's right. It's rare to see anyone of color in the Republican party, and LGBTQ also. Ellen and I don't really talk about politics. After all, everyone we know is left-leaning. I guess that's the advantage of living in Los Angeles.

HENRY

It's like a bubble! So much stuff we take for granted like being gay and not getting harassed.

STAN

Right. Jews here don't have to worry about anti-Semitism either.

HENRY

Don't get offended by this, but do people ever say you don't look Jewish because of your blonde hair and blue eyes?

STAN

No. Would you believe, that hasn't come up anywhere except with Ellen's parents. When I met them, they were *convinced* I was a gentile. I had to really show them that I was Jewish. It was crazy! I even bought the book, *Judaism for Dummies!*

HENRY

Did you have to prove you were circumcised?

*They laugh.*

STAN

Practically. No, really, they died a few years after we got married. It was hard on Ellen, but to be honest, not having in-laws is a blessing.

HENRY

Well, mine both died so I don't have to worry.

STAN

So, your kids are interracial? How did you arrange that?

HENRY

We used a white surrogate and Keith's sperm. We wanted the children to be a part of both of us. Keith's parents were interracial and Keith wanted that gene and DNA carried forward.

STAN

I don't know much about surrogates and sperm donors and embryos. I heard that embryos are being destroyed. Is that true?

HENRY

You sound like one of those conspiracy theorists on the right. What's really odd about your question is that Keith asked the same thing. As if embryos are really alive and disposing of them is like an abortion. Maybe I shouldn't be mouthing off about this. I just assume you and I are on the same page politically.

STAN

Oh, don't worry! We are. I'm sorry. I was just curious about the procedure.

HENRY

We used a surrogate and IVF.

STAN

Since we're getting into this personal stuff, I might as well ask you if you guys are monogamous?

HENRY

Yes. I mean, we've never discussed it, but as far as I can tell, we believe in fidelity. I can't imagine cheating, and Keith would never do it either. Well, I would kill him if he did anything like that!

STAN

You're joking, right?

HENRY

So what would happen if you found out that Ellen was having an affair.

STAN

It's not going to happen.

HENRY

Why are you asking about this?

STAN

I don't know. I thought maybe because you were gay that the rules were different. Aren't men supposed to be more animalistic than women?

HENRY

Being gay doesn't have anything to do with fidelity. You make it sound like our needs are different because we're men. I think that's a stereotype. Left over from when homophobia was rampant.

STAN

Well, the reason I asked is because Keith is an actor, and you have to admit he's good looking. I see what happens when he meets someone. I imagine women *and* men melting when he stares.

HENRY

I'm surprised you see that. You must be comfortable with your sexuality to acknowledge that Keith is a *ten*!

STAN

For god's sake, it's the twenty-first century! But listen, I *do* need to ask you about something.

HENRY

If it's about food, I try to avoid talking about nutrition when I'm not working. You'd be surprised how many times I'm asked for advice when they hear that this is my profession. Plus, when they hear that I had a minor in psychology, they think I'm sort of a guru on dieting.

STAN

No, it's not about food. This is something I found out about *you* by accident.

HENRY

I'm not sure I know what you mean.

STAN

I was doing research for this company called Truth Search for one of my clients who told me that he wanted to buy some stock there. I was unfamiliar with that company; it had only recently gotten on the stock market. I was fascinated by what they provided in terms of background checks; arrest records, if the person had been sued, social media used, etc. So just for fun I put your name in. I actually was curious to see what would come up for you. You never talk about your past. Sort of a blank slate.

HENRY

I'm surprised that you just didn't enter *yourself*. I mean, that way you would know how accurate the results were.

STAN

Yeah, I probably should have.

*Henry is agitated. He rubs his hands together and raises his voice when he asks:*

HENRY

What did you find?

STAN

There was something on your record about being a juvenile delinquent. It didn't say what you had done or if you served any time. But there was something about you being a convicted felon.



HENRY

I don't know anything about that, and I really don't like people checking out my past. At least not friends. This could be very damaging for me, especially if anyone had access to it. You haven't told anyone, right? Ellen or Keith?

STAN

No, no, of course not! I haven't told anyone. I wanted to run it by you, anyway. But since you say it's false, that probably means my client shouldn't buy any stock in that company. And maybe you should check it out and find out whether the company is running some sort of scam.

HENRY

You know, I'm getting sweaty. I think I'll take a dip. Didn't Ellen want you to start the potatoes?

STAN

Oh shit! You're right. Better get those going.

HENRY

*(shouting)*

Keith! do you want to go in the pool?

*HENRY takes off his shorts and T-shirt and walks offstage to the pool.  
KEITH runs out of the kitchen and joins HENRY pulling off his own shorts  
and T-shirt. STAN finishes putting the potatoes on the grill.*

*Lights dim.*

SCENE 4

*ELLEN comes out of the kitchen into the backyard while STAN finishes with the potatoes.*

ELLEN

How's the chef doing?

STAN

Got distracted. I just put the potatoes on the grill.

ELLEN

Did you guys have fun talking about the latest sports scandal?

STAN

Very funny. No, we didn't get into that.

ELLEN

Well, what did you talk about? You both seemed very animated.

STAN

Just complaining about our partners.

ELLEN

I doubt that. Keith and I are perfect!

STAN

No, really; we were talking about the past. You know, before marriage. Henry and I were finding it odd that we knew nothing about our spouses before getting married.

ELLEN

Likewise for us! Is there something you wanted to ask me?

STAN

You know how I tell you about you talking in your sleep? Most of the time it's gibberish, but recently you were crying, 'Doctor, Doctor! No! No! Rob, Rob!' Does that mean anything to you?

ELLEN

No.

STAN

Who is this Robby?

ELLEN

Beats me.

STAN

I don't know why, but I feel like this doctor had something to do with your past. It's a gut feeling. Probably nothing.

ELLEN

I wish I'd remembered the dream or nightmare I was having when I said those words. I'm not remembering my dreams like I did when I was younger.

STAN

And you didn't have a boyfriend named Rob? I don't know anything about who you dated before we got together.

ELLEN

No. There was no Rob in my past. I didn't date very much.

STAN

But you weren't a virgin when we married. Don't tell me you had a one-night stand!

ELLEN

Why? What's so bad about that? Don't men have one night stands all the time? Especially teenage boys?

STAN

That wasn't the case for me. I only had sex with girls who I assumed would be marriage material or at least someone I liked beyond the way they looked.

ELLEN

That's nice to know. That's why I fell in love with you -- because you weren't like those other creeps. But I really *was* a virgin.

STAN

But you seemed so in control. Like sex was something you had done before. There wasn't any blood, and you never asked me to go slow or say it was your first time.

ELLEN

Maybe because I started masturbating when I reached puberty, so my body was ready for sex. And I trusted you; you made me so relaxed. Oh, Stan, I better put some more sunblock on your back. It looks like you're getting color. Obviously Henry didn't massage enough.

*She takes the lotion and begins rubbing it on STAN's back.*

STAN

That feels so good. Almost as good as when Henry was applying the sunblock.

*ELLEN jokingly hits STAN.*

STAN (CONT'D)

All this talk about sex is getting me horny. Want to go to the bedroom?

ELLEN

And just abandon Henry and Keith?

STAN

We could say we needed to take a nap.

ELLEN

I don't think so. Even though I'm in the mood, let's just wait until after they leave.

STAN

Okay. So, is there anything you ever wanted to know about me from my illicit past?

ELLEN

This hasn't been a burning question, but it *is* something I'm curious about. And since we brought up the normally taboo subject of sex, why not bring up religion?

STAN

I guess that's fair.

ELLEN

So you say you are on board about the kids getting *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah*, but you never talk about your own religious background. I don't even know if you're Conservative or Reform. I guess I assumed you were Reform. And you never say anything like, 'Let's light Shabbat candles, drink wine and have *challah*.' If I suggest it, you go along with it. Maybe your family never had any rituals or traditions.

STAN

Yeah, not really. We just did the bare minimum. Seder for Passover and going to services during the High Holidays.

ELLEN

But now it seems like you don't even want to do that.

STAN

Is that such a crime? I just don't get anything out of it.

ELLEN

So, nothing for Chanukah? Oh, let me guess, you were one of those Jewish families that had a Christmas tree.

STAN

No, actually we didn't. Oh, I forgot.  
We *did* light candles and get gifts. But  
we didn't make a big deal out of it.

ELLEN

Never got jealous when your friends  
got tons of gifts on Christmas?

STAN

My parents were upper middle-class,  
so we got just as many gifts.

*KEITH and HENRY come back from the swimming pool as they dry  
themselves off with towels.*

KEITH

God, that felt so good! I love being in  
the water. You guys should go in.  
We'll finish up in the kitchen and  
check on the barbecue.

ELLEN

What do you think, Stan?

STAN

Sounds like a deal.

HENRY

Have fun, guys!

*STAN and ELLEN walk off stage to the pool. The lights dim in the  
backyard, and the lights go up in the kitchen. KEITH and HENRY enter  
the kitchen.*

KEITH

Do you think Stan and Ellen are  
happy?

HENRY

What are you talking about?

KEITH

I don't know. Sometimes I feel that  
they're going through a crisis.

HENRY

What?

KEITH

Well, for one, Stan doesn't seem that interested in religion. Ellen is frustrated. But it's even more than that. It seems that both of them are keeping secrets from before they were married.

HENRY

Why is that important?

KEITH

Because who we are today relates to our past.

HENRY

What are you getting at?

KEITH

Maybe I'm getting curious about who *you* were before we met. I know nothing. And you know nothing about me.

HENRY

I thought we decided not to dwell on our history. Neither of us needs to know who we had sex with or who we dated.

KEITH

But there are other things that make us who we are today. Not necessarily only sex.

HENRY

You mean like religion?

KEITH

Yes. There's that, but what about things we may be ashamed of or just felt that there was no point in talking about; that we didn't need to reveal to each other. That it might have

KEITH

prevented us from falling in love and getting married.

HENRY

You need to give me an example, Keith.

KEITH

Okay. For instance. what if one of us had gotten into trouble with the law.

HENRY

Keith, what are you saying?

KEITH

You asked for an example.

HENRY

Whoa! I think I feel sick.

*HENRY runs out of the kitchen and you hear the sound of him throwing up offstage.*

KEITH

Are you okay?

HENRY

I'm nauseous. Must have eaten something bad, but I feel better now. Just give me a few minutes.

KEITH

Okay. I'm going outside to the barbecue. I'll see you there.

*KEITH walks out of the kitchen. The lights dim in the kitchen, and the lights go up the backyard. KEITH checks how the potatoes are doing. Shortly afterwards, HENRY enters the backyard.*

HENRY

Boy! I haven't thrown up in ages. I wonder if it was that drink we had right before we went swimming.

KEITH

Yes, they're trying to poison us.



HENRY

It's not funny.

KEITH

You're in a pissy mood. What's going on?

HENRY

Something *did* happen at work. One of my patients went to a Psychic Nutritionist.

KEITH

God! What's that?

HENRY

They use mumbo jumbo to diagnose what foods people should eat. It's a scam.

KEITH

So, why are you upset?

HENRY

She complained that I wasn't helping her, and that's why she went. I don't like patients criticizing me. I'm sure you feel the same thing when a director complains about your acting. And I blame the internet. There's so much fake stuff out there!

KEITH

But I'm used to it. I guess this hasn't happened to you before.

HENRY

No. And there is something else that's bothering me. Stan brought up something that he found on the internet. He entered my name and there was a record of me being arrested -- a juvenile delinquent and convicted felon.

KEITH

That isn't true, is it?

HENRY

I told him I didn't know anything about it . . . but it *is* true.

KEITH

Wait a minute! You've got to be kidding me!

HENRY

No, it *did* happen, but it was a long time ago. I've changed.

KEITH

Changed? Do I even know you? Did it ever cross your mind that I would want to know something like that before we got married?

HENRY

Why? I didn't see why you needed to know. It was a black mark against me that I wanted to forget about.

KEITH

Did you not trust me? You could have been a murderer. I surely would have wanted to know *that!*

HENRY

Stop joking. I was worried that you might not want to go through with the wedding. We'd been dating for so many years. I just never had a chance to tell you.

*HENRY moves closer to KEITH and tries to put his arms around him. KEITH backs away.*

KEITH

I wish you would have trusted me with that information. What crime did you commit?

HENRY

I don't want to talk about this until we get home.

KEITH

No, I want to know now! At this point I don't care if Stan or Ellen hear about it.

HENRY

You can't force me.

KEITH

I think you're mistaken there. If you don't tell me, maybe I should call the clinic where you're working, and maybe tell our children about their father. That he's a convicted felon. Do they even know about this at work? Did you lie on your job application?

HENRY

Don't threaten me, Keith! The clinic *does* know about it but without any details.

*KEITH looks for his iPhone. When he finds it, he tells Siri:*

KEITH

Siri, call Eatwell Nutrition Clinics.

*HENRY grabs the iPhone.*

HENRY

Okay. You win. I'll tell you.

*Lights dim.*

## SCENE 5

*KEITH listens to HENRY who has agreed to “confess.”*

KEITH

You better be telling me the truth.

HENRY

I am. I was seventeen. It was a dare by my friends. Me and another guy named Brian. It was like an indoctrination into a club. We had to buy liquor. The two of us came up with this scheme that we would hang out at a liquor store and ask a customer to buy us alcohol. We lucked out because within five minutes a man was going to help us out. We gave him money for beer. But when he came out of the store, he walked right past us. He was carrying a six-pack.

Brian and I were pissed. We decided to jump the guy and get the beer. Brian was bigger than me so he knocked the guy to the ground. I punched his head a few times just to make sure we could get away. But when he hit the pavement, the guy didn't move. Like he had fainted or something. Brian told me, 'Get the six-pack. I'm going to look for the guy's wallet.' Once I had my hands on the beer, I told Brian, 'Hey, we better get out of here. We don't want to get caught assaulting this guy.' And all along, I noticed the man wasn't moving. I figured he may have had a concussion because I didn't see any blood. Just as we started to run, we heard sirens. The owner of the shop must have called them. We were both arrested. And it turned out that the man had *died* from the fall. We were both charged with accidental manslaughter and sentenced to three years in jail.

KEITH

And you were seventeen, and you let the man die?

HENRY

Yes. I *am* ashamed of it all. It took me years to get over that. But I did my penance.

KEITH

This isn't like A.A., you know, where you make amends to someone you injured. In this case, you *killed* someone!

HENRY

Before we were sentenced, I was really so sorry and showed remorse. As we were escorted out of the courtroom, I saw the man's wife. I tried to say how sorry I was, but she spit on me. And after I got released, I tried to contact her, but she had moved out of state. There was no forwarding address. So, finally, there was nothing I could do.

KEITH

I just wish you would have told me. And the fact that Stan knows about it means that anyone can find out the information. Nothing is a secret anymore!

HENRY

But I told him it wasn't true!

KEITH

Maybe he believed you; maybe not. That's why you should have told me. At least I won't be blindsided if it comes up now. Do they know at work?

HENRY

The clinic is small. I told them, but they didn't do a background check on

HENRY

me. I've been one of their most loyal and productive employees.

KEITH

Have you thought about admitting it to them?

HENRY

Why?

KEITH

Because it would be better if you came clean rather than them finding out. If Stan discovered this on the internet, who else might look?

HENRY

I can't worry about that.

KEITH

I just thought of something else. When we first started dating, you would have these appointments once a week. I think you told me you were in therapy. That was a lie, too, wasn't it?

HENRY

Yes! I was on parole. Shit! I wanted to tell you, but it seemed I never could find the right time. And then so much time had passed.

KEITH

This is insanity! All these lies! You say you changed when you were in prison. But have you really? Supposedly taking responsibility for your actions, but then this deception.

HENRY

You have to understand, Keith. I was so scared that you would think badly of me. Remember, you were the first person I said, 'I love you' to.

*HENRY begins to cry and when he tries to hug KEITH, KEITH stops him. The voices of ELLEN and STAN are heard.*

STAN, ELLEN  
*(variously, from offstage)*  
Hey you guys, are the potatoes done yet?

*ELLEN and STAN enter drying themselves off.*

ELLEN  
Oh, that was so refreshing. That pool is worth a million dollars.

STAN  
Well, it did cost a small fortune.

ELLEN  
What were you two doing? You look so guilt-ridden. Were you doing the deed?

KEITH  
Without your permission? Never!

HENRY  
We were just talking.

KEITH  
About Henry's illicit past.

STAN  
Oh, tell us more!

ELLEN  
I'm going to get the burgers. They're all vegetarian, so they'll cook quickly. Why don't you all set the table and carry out everything else.

*HENRY, KEITH and STAN go in and out completing their tasks. ELLEN returns with the burgers. STAN places the burgers on the barbecue. HENRY, KEITH and ELLEN sit at the table facing the audience.*

ELLEN (CONT'D)  
I'm starving! All those water sports in the pool.

KEITH  
Water sports? Mmm, I didn't think you guys were that kinky.

ELLEN

As if! Stan, come and sit while they're cooking.

STAN

Yes, master.

HENRY

Did you hear what's going on in Washington, D.C.? I can't believe what the Republicans are doing.

STAN

Oh no! I thought this was going to be a politically-free zone.

KEITH

*(ignoring Stan)* I keep hearing about conservatives being afraid to express their feelings in public or in schools. They feel isolated.

STAN

Okay, okay! Let's limit this discussion to no more than five minutes. Frankly, that's about all my stomach can take.

KEITH

I'm tired of "woke." I'm sick of the left being hypocritical. Not willing to have a discussion if it's something they disagree with. I bet if the Nazis wanted to march these days, it would be outlawed, unlike how the courts ruled in the past.

HENRY

Sounds like you're sticking up for those right-wing conspiracy theorists.

KEITH

This is all about freedom of speech.

HENRY

*Hate* speech, you mean.



KEITH

I can't believe this! I can see why couples don't want to talk about politics.

HENRY

Amen to that. What do *you* think, Stan?

STAN

Ellen and I are on the same page, so it's not an issue.

HENRY

Well, I thought I was the same as Keith. Now I'm not so sure. I don't even know how Keith voted in the last election.

KEITH

Why do you need to know? What would happen if I voted Republican?

HENRY

A black man voting for a Republican? Especially a *gay* black man voting that way? That would be insanity!

*KEITH stands up from the table and pauses before he speaks.*

KEITH

What if it *was* me?

HENRY

Is this some hypothetical?

KEITH

No. I really *did* vote Republican, and I *have* voted Republican since I started voting at eighteen.

STAN

Whoa!

HENRY

So you've been keeping this to yourself the whole time we were dating and married?

KEITH

Yes! I knew you and your leftist friends would never understand. They would probably be talking behind our backs. I didn't even know how *you* would take it.

HENRY

Is this why we never talk about politics?

KEITH

You made *that* rule, Henry.

HENRY

But I never suspected that you were a traitor!

KEITH

Oh, don't be so melodramatic!

STAN

Hey, you guys! Let's get off this subject and enjoy the glorious day.

KEITH

No, I don't want to drop it now that it's out in the open. How do you vote, Ellen?

ELLEN

Usually Democratic, but I don't vote for representatives just because they have a "D" by their name on the ballot. I don't think it's good for us to live in the California bubble. We need to listen to the other side.

HENRY

They want to ban abortions for anyone under the age of eighteen -- with no exceptions, even for rape or incest. And another thing, for anyone requesting an abortion, it has to be approved by the father. If the father is unknown, the abortion can't happen.

*ELLEN looks ill. She runs into the house. STAN gets up to run after her shouting to HENRY and KEITH.*

STAN

Watch the burgers! I'm going to find out what's wrong with Ellen.

HENRY

I wonder if she's feeling sick from the drink; the same way it affected me.

*Lights dim.*

SCENE 6

*In the kitchen, ELLEN is sitting on a kitchen chair with her head down.*

STAN

Are you feeling any better?

ELLEN

Yes, after I threw up . . . but my stomach is still a little queasy.

STAN

Should I send Henry and Keith home and say you don't feel well enough to entertain, let alone eat?

ELLEN

Stan, it wasn't really my stomach that upset me, it was something else. When Henry was talking about abortions, it made me realize that I . . .

*ELLEN stops talking and starts to cry. She lets STAN soothe her before she continues.*

STAN

What is it, hon?

ELLEN

Stan . . . I had an abortion.

STAN

What?

ELLEN

I never told you.

STAN

Why would you do that? Especially without talking to me about it. We never put a limit as to how many children we were going to raise.

ELLEN

It happened before we got married, Stan.

STAN

Before you met me?

ELLEN

No, while we were dating.

STAN

Wait! Wait! Help me understand.  
While we were dating you got  
pregnant and had an abortion?

ELLEN

Yes.

STAN

So you had sex with another man  
while we were dating? I thought we  
were monogamous pretty early on in  
our relationship and definitely after we  
had sex for the first time. I remember  
our discussion. We were very clear  
about fidelity. At least for me, I would  
*never* consider having any sexual  
relations outside of our marriage. I  
thought it was the same for you.

ELLEN

Yes. That's true.

STAN

So, you haven't answered my question.  
Did you have sex with another man  
while we were dating?

ELLEN

No. I did not.

STAN

Oh, my god! *I* was the one who got  
you pregnant? Why wouldn't you have  
told me?

ELLEN

I didn't want you to feel pressured into  
getting married. We both were just  
starting our careers, and it wouldn't  
have been the right time to have a  
child. And I didn't *want* a child.

STAN

But you *still* could have talked to me about it. This was *my* child, too!

ELLEN

Maybe I was wrong. I should have talked to you. But you might have tried to talk me out of an abortion. We hadn't even been talking about marriage when it happened. Plus, I didn't want to tell my folks. Even if we had gotten married, they would have done the math and become aware that I had gotten pregnant before we got married. I didn't want that confrontation.

STAN

But they would have understood, wouldn't they? They were liberal-minded and Reform Jews.

ELLEN

No, I don't think they would have understood. They were okay with me having sex but *insisted* on me being on the pill and that safe sex would be practiced; and that meant that the man had to wear a condom.

STAN

And we *did* all those things.

ELLEN

But I *still* got pregnant. Maybe I missed taking the pill, or there was a hole in the condom you used. The point is that in certain ways my parents were very old-school. If they had known I was pregnant, they would have insisted we get married, and they never would have let me get an abortion.

STAN

So you just went ahead and did this on your own? Fuck! You aborted a child

STAN

and a grandchild of your parents and my parents.

ELLEN

I just wasn't thinking of it that way.

STAN

You've got *that* right! This is all starting to make sense. That dream you were having where you kept screaming 'doctor' and then 'Rob, Rob, Rob!'

ELLEN

The OB doctor's name was Robert. He's the one who did the abortion. I must have been having nightmares. It's all this current politization of abortions.

STAN

No. I think you finally got hit with feeling guilty about what you had done.

ELLEN

Can you please make an excuse for me to Keith and Henry? I'm just not up for the barbecue.

STAN

No! I want them to stay. See what they think about this revelation. That reminds me, did this abortion . . . did it impact your fertility? Was that the reason we had to adopt?

ELLEN

Yes! Oh, god, I couldn't decide what to do! I had this rare condition that I didn't find out about until we were trying to have kids. What good would it have done even if I had told you?

STAN

This is a shitstorm of revelations. What else are you hiding from me?

STAN

Wait until Henry and Keith hear about this!

ELLEN

Now you're being unreasonable. This is just between you and me.

STAN

But we tell them everything. We're an open book. Besides, they're harboring their own secrets.

ELLEN

What more is there to discuss about this? Maybe I don't owe you any further explanation for why I did what I did.

STAN

That's bullshit! We're in a partnership. That's what marriage is supposed to be. I've always been totally honest with you.

ELLEN

Really? Are you telling me that there is nothing you've kept hidden from me? Everyone has stuff that they keep to themselves. When I work with patients, and they tell me about cheating on their spouse and how they feel guilty, I always ask them, do you really want to tell your partner or are you just being selfish? Thinking if you got it off your chest, you wouldn't feel the guilt.

STAN

What is this? Some kind of one-upmanship? You want me to come up with some big secret?

ELLEN

What I want from you is a little compassion and understanding. People make mistakes all the time. The way



ELLEN

you're talking; it's like you don't want to forgive me.

STAN

Right now, *that's* how I feel. Don't you want me to be honest about my feelings?

ELLEN

I'm tired. I'm going to sleep. You, Keith and Henry can enjoy the barbecue without me.

*ELLEN gets up and walks toward the bedroom.*

STAN

You people are privileged. I see it every day at work. Greedy. Always holding on to every dollar.

*ELLEN turns around and comes angrily within inches of STAN.*

ELLEN

What? What do you mean by *you people*? You sound like one of those antisemites. But you're *Jewish*! You're one of *those* people.

STAN

. . . No, I'm not.

ELLEN

What you mean? 'No, I'm not.'

STAN

I'm *not* Jewish.

ELLEN

What? But that's what you told me. That's how we got married. You go to High Holiday services and want your children to get *bar* and *bat mitzvah*. Everyone knows that you're Jewish. My parents especially knew that. Are you just trying to get back at me? You must be joking about this!

STAN

Why would I joke about something so serious? I'm just tired of being something I'm not. I mean, you're finally admitting to me a secret you've held onto since before we were married. So . . .you're making me want to come clean. I don't think I'm being selfish.

ELLEN

This is much worse! Pretending to be Jewish? How can you live with yourself? I didn't lie about having an abortion. You never asked me, and I didn't share it with you.

STAN

I did it for *you*. For your parents. I loved you, and I knew that if I wasn't Jewish, your parents would have never let you marry me. Judaism is in your blood.

ELLEN

Now that I think of it, why *don't* we ask Keith and Henry? I'm not going to keep this a secret. The children should know. Even our neighbors. I don't want to live with a lie. Let it all hang out. Bring it on!

*ELLEN marches out of the kitchen and STAN follows her.*

*Lights dim.*

SCENE 7

*Lights come up on in the backyard. KEITH and HENRY are sitting at the patio table. STAN and ELLEN are standing.*

KEITH

We were wondering what happened to you guys. Everything is done. I'm ready to eat.

HENRY

What was going on in there?

STAN

Oh, I feel like we were on a fishing expedition. Finding out things about ourselves that we had never revealed.

KEITH

Oh? Actually there's been some of that on our end, too.

ELLEN

Those drinks you made must have had some kind of truth serum in them.

HENRY

I wish I'd known.

STAN

Are we all brave enough to share?

ELLEN

Stan, this isn't funny.

STAN

You're a therapist. You can act as group facilitator.

KEITH

I don't want this to be a therapy session.

HENRY

Why not? I bet you would never go for couples therapy.

KEITH

You don't know that! You didn't seem so upset when you found out that I'm a Republican.

HENRY

But I *am* angry. I think I was just in shock when you told us all earlier.

KEITH

It's nothing compared to what *you* did!

*HENRY gets up from his chair and gets in KEITH's face. KEITH pushes him away.*

KEITH (CONT'D)

Hey! I don't think it's a good idea to get physical with me. We're not kids picking a fight with one another. Well, *you* would know about that. How to attack someone.

HENRY

Don't you dare say another word! It's private!

*STAN separates them and motions for them to sit in the patio chairs.*

STAN

Wow! Two gay men in a physical fight. That sure shatters the stereotype. But really guys, what's all this about? I thought we were going to civilly spill all. What you guys did couldn't be any worse than *our* sins.

ELLEN

Sins? We aren't sinners, Stan!

STAN

What do you call aborting a baby and never telling the father? And then she went ahead and lied to me about not being able to have children. That she was infertile. It was because of that damn abortion!

ELLEN

Stop it, Stan! It was my body, my choice!

STAN

Don't give me that bullshit! I bet Keith would never stand for it. I'm sure Keith is one of those anti-abortionists.

KEITH

Don't lump me in with any far-right nut job! I'm an old-fashioned conservative. I believe in conservative values.

HENRY

Sure, like not believing in identity politics . . . no quotas, no affirmative action.

KEITH

Just tell us all about how you were in jail for manslaughter.

HENRY

It was accidental.

STAN

Henry, I asked you about this, what I found on the internet, and you said it wasn't true.

KEITH

Oh, he's good at lying. He never told me about his stint in jail for *three years!*

ELLEN

Is this really true, Henry? You kept this from Keith?

HENRY

No one is supposed to know.

STAN

I bet you haven't told the people you work for.

ELLEN

You want to know what Stan did?  
Talk about lying. He's not *Jewish*! He  
stood in a temple with a rabbi giving  
us a blessing while all along he was  
*Catholic*! He lied to everyone!  
Pretended to be Jewish. He says it was  
because he loved me, and he was  
afraid my parents wouldn't let me get  
married. As if I had no say in the  
matter. That I wouldn't go against my  
parents. This is like a soap opera!

*STAN tries to hug ELLEN, but she pushes him away.*

KEITH

This almost feels like a contest. Who  
kept the biggest secret from their  
husband or wife.

STAN

Ellen, I want to know exactly what  
was going on in your mind. Maybe it  
will help me understand.

ELLEN

If I tell all, you better do the same.

STAN

Just start from when you realized you  
were pregnant.

ELLEN

Funny, I knew almost right away that  
Stan had gotten me pregnant. I missed  
my period, felt nauseous and started  
gaining weight. So it was no surprise  
when I took the pregnancy test. None  
of this bothered me. I just thought  
things happen. I didn't want to let this  
accident define my life. So, it was a  
quick decision. Better to not tell  
anyone because they would want to  
talk me out of it. Not even my  
girlfriend, Susan, knew. We shared  
everything, but not *this*. Found a  
doctor and told him I wanted an

ELLEN

abortion. And it was done. No regrets. I guess as a future therapist, I could counsel *myself*. I didn't see any reason why I should tell you, Stan. I mean, I toyed with the idea, and periodically I would say to myself, 'Maybe I should have told Stan. It would then have been a joint decision.' But I'm not one to dwell on things. But recently with Roe vs. Wade getting overturned, I was becoming haunted. What would have happened if I *couldn't* have gotten an abortion?

STAN

I don't know. I want to believe everything you're saying. I wish I could understand and just say, 'I forgive you.'

ELLEN

Now that I've bared my soul, you need to tell us how you fooled everyone into thinking you were Jewish. Maybe if I forgive you, then you can forgive me.

STAN

You have to understand, I stopped believing in God when my mother died. I was never that religious. Hardly went to church. And when I met you, Ellen, and saw how much love and support you got from not only your parents but from the community of friends you had at temple, I thought pretending to be Jewish might get it to rub off on *me*.

In the back of my mind, I considered converting. But it was never about believing in God or the rituals and traditions that you followed. I just couldn't buy that. And when you told me how adamant your parents

STAN

were about only letting you marry a Jewish man, I felt cornered. When I saw how narrow-minded they were and how their religious beliefs ruled their lives, it told me that I could *never* convert. That would be going too far. Still, I would do anything for you. I knew you had this strong relationship with your parents. In a way you should be glad I never tried to convert; that, at least, I was true to myself about being an atheist, even though I would never admit that to you.

*HENRY interrupted.*

HENRY

Oh, my god! That's what *I've* been feeling, and I was afraid to tell you, Keith, because religion and your belief in God were so strong. You wanted to instill that feeling in our children. But I'm a closeted atheist! That's why I haven't been that engaged with any *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah* plans for the kids.

KEITH

Another secret. That's two already.

HENRY

I'm sorry.

KEITH

That's too easy. Let Stan finish his story and then we'll get to *you!*

STAN

I don't know what else you want from me.

ELLEN

What was it like being in the synagogue? I see now why you seemed a little lost during the



ELLEN

Passover seder and always had me run it.

STAN

I think one of the most difficult aspects of my pretending related to the counseling we had with the rabbi before we got married. I felt so guilty when he talked about keeping a Jewish home.

ELLEN

And you never even considered converting?

STAN

I already told you how I felt about converting. It would have been too much of a commitment. And it's not quick. Don't you have to wait at least a year after you've gone through all the holidays and experience all the life cycle events? Plus, I didn't even know if your parents would have accepted me as a convert; not born Jewish. I heard rumblings at temple that scared me. Things like, 'Well, he's not *really* Jewish!'

ELLEN

In my mind, whoever said that isn't truly Jewish themselves. They're closed-minded. The congregants that I know practice the Jewish religion fully in their lives. I wish you'd have been brave enough to talk to me about this.

STAN

I was a fool.

ELLEN

And now what are we going to do? What will our children and our neighbors think? It's makes me think that we should move to another

ELLEN

community where they don't know what you did.

STAN

I don't want to run. If we do this together, I can imagine that it will all work out.

ELLEN

What about me? Is there something you want *me* to do? Some kind of atonement?

STAN

I want to make something clear. I believe a woman should have the right to choose. Abortion should always be an option. It's just that in your case; it should have been a *joint* decision. But I guess you could say it's history. It can't be undone. I'm just being pig-headed about it. It just *hurts!*

ELLEN

It hurts me too.

*ELLEN and STAN hug one another and say at the same time.*

STAN AND ELLEN

I forgive you!

*HENRY and KEITH both clap.*

ELLEN

Okay, you guys. We did our housecleaning. Had our cathartic confessions. It's your turn. Keith, why don't you start? Your indiscretion is the least inflammatory of the four of us. I'm curious how you ever ended up being a Republican.

KEITH

It was a family thing, but we kept it under wraps. That's why it never came up when we were getting married. In our family we never talked about

KEITH

political alliances, and it seemed like in Henry's family, you *also* didn't talk about politics. It just pushes too many buttons!

STAN

In a way, that's very old-school. In the present, when you get married, political leanings are important. Sort of a hallmark of relationships. Building a foundation where you both have the same values.

KEITH

I don't think the party you belong to has anything to do with shared values.

HENRY

I disagree. Looking at life the same way is important. And the different parties are the new religion. That's where like-minded people congregate now; within the Democrat or Republican Party.

KEITH

This isn't about me and my indiscretion -- which *definitely* is the wrong word to describe my sin of omission.

HENRY

But now that you've revealed your party affiliation, and I understand why you were sulking when your guy lost, I understand more about what makes you tick. And when I asked you about it, you never answered me beyond saying that it was nothing. I guess now you'll be spouting off like a Fox News host. The guardrails are off!

KEITH

Well, and *you* can let out your progressive and “woke” theories, too!

ELLEN

Enough with this! You're not going to win any battles, but I'm interested to know about your incarceration, Henry. Of course, if you're willing.

HENRY

What can I say? I was a mixed-up kid. I felt all the peer pressure.

ELLEN

I'm a bit surprised with you being Jewish. We don't hear many stories about Jews going to jail.

HENRY

You'd be surprised how many Jews I met in prison. Committing crime is an equal opportunity provider.

ELLEN

What did you tell your parents?

HENRY

I told them it was a mistake. I didn't go into any details, and when they asked if I wanted an attorney, I said 'no.' The state provided one. I pled guilty. I wanted to take responsibility for my actions and not have it hanging over my head.

KEITH

Hard to believe your parents just accepted this. Never asking you for an explanation.

HENRY

That's exactly what they did. And I figured the less people who knew about this, the better. The attorney said he could get my sentence reduced to three years. I thought that was fair. Somehow, word never spread at school. I had just graduated from high school. I didn't have many friends beyond the hoodlums I was hanging

HENRY

out with, so no one really cared that I was missing. Figured I'd gone to a college out of town, or something.

KEITH

But how did you survive in prison? I can't imagine myself being in jail. Being gay and African-American would not be a good combination.

HENRY

I lucked out. I had not turned eighteen yet, so I wasn't convicted as an adult. There were no hardened criminals in jail with me. I shared a cell with a quiet boy, and I had the opportunity to continue my schooling.

ELLEN

But what about how you were handling this emotionally. This was accidental manslaughter!

HENRY

Actually it was *involuntary* manslaughter.

ELLEN

And you never worried that this mark on your record would prevent you from getting a job?

HENRY

Again, I was lucky. I did check off that box on my application, but the clinic I work for never did any vetting. Or if they did, they've never mentioned it to me. I didn't feel burdened by it, and when we were dating and got married, I just didn't see the point in bringing it up. I was different back then. I had matured. Being in jail helped me grow up.

KEITH

This whole thing makes me sad. That you didn't trust me.

HENRY

So, what can I do to make this up to you? And please don't say, 'it will take time.'

ELLEN

Whoa! That's the first time I've heard someone say that.

KEITH

You know, I have an idea. With all these revelations today, what does everyone think about renewing our vows? But this time we say our vows out loud. We never did that at our wedding.

ELLEN

Same here. We thought it would be corny. We knew how we felt about each other. Looking back, this might have been a mistake about not speaking our vows at our wedding.

STAN

But this time, we are being honest. No secrets.

HENRY

If we do this, would it just be private? I still don't think my incarceration should be public knowledge.

KEITH

That's a good question, I hadn't thought about that.

ELLEN

Maybe there's a way to do the reveals delicately, in a way that isn't inflammatory.

STAN

Keith, I think this is a great idea. It's a way for us all to start fresh.

HENRY

And maybe we should invite the people we are closest to.

STAN AND ELLEN

Okay! We're all in!

KEITH AND HENRY

Okay! We're all in, too!

*Lights dim. When the lights come up, STAN, ELLEN, KEITH, And HENRY all have their backs to the audience. A voice comes from offstage:*

VOICE

Now that you have renewed your vows, each of you will break the glass. The sound of shattering marks the end of the ceremony and the beginning of a new chapter in each of your lives. As those fragments of glass scatter, so does the anxiety of the past dissolve and create a path to a new life.

*All four stomp on a glass at their feet, turn around and shout 'Mazel Tov.'*

THE END

