

EMPTY NEST

"Harry isn't Houdini"

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EMPTY NEST

"Harry Can't be Houdini"

TEASER

(FADE IN:)

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

HARRY IS SEATED AT HIS OFFICE DESK ALONE. HE IS ON THE PHONE TO CHARLIE.

HARRY

Charlie. What was it you said you wanted?

(PAUSE.) Oh. A movie projector. (PAUSE.) Yes, I

have an old super eight projector. It's

somewhere up in the attic. I haven't used it

since, (SMILES.) Well, the girls were teenagers.

(PAUSE.) Sure. I'll get it down when I get home, just come by and pick it up. Bye. (HE HANGS UP

THE PHONE.)

LAVERNE OPENS UP THE DOOR A CRACK AND STICKS HER HEAD INSIDE.

LAVERNE

Harry (PAUSES AS HE LOOKS UP.) You'll never guess who walked in with a new customer.

HARRY

Okay. (MAKES HIMSELF LOOK DEEP IN THOUGHT.) Jimmy Hoffa brought his grandson in for a check up. (SHAKES HIS HEAD AND THINKS SOME MORE.) I know! Ron and Nancy are bringing Maureen in for her check up. (PAUSE.) Are they bringing cash; you know he's unemployed now.

LAVERNE

Don't be an idiot! I told you you'd never guess. (SHE HESITATES.)

HARRY

I don't suppose Wally and the Beaver are walking around the corner? They finally broke Eddy Haskall's arm. (PAUSE.) I just hope June Cleaver is coming too, I hate to deal with those boys alone.

LAVERNE

I knew you'd never guess; you're a miserable
guesser.

HARRY

(SMILES.) But, I'm a loveable old geezer.

(LAUGHS FOR A SECOND, THEN CONTINUES.) Well. Can
I have a clue as to who is really out there?

LAVERNE

It's little Abigail Skirmerhorne, only now she's
big Abigail West.

HARRY

Now, that's a clue I can deal with. I guess

Abigail Skirmerhorne is out there(STANDING UP.)

Well, bring her in. I haven't seen her in...

(THINKS.) ten years or so.

LAVERNE OPENS THE DOOR WIDE AND USHERS IN ABIGAIL. ABIGAIL
ENTERS, CARRYING A TWO YEAR OLD GIRL IN HER ARMS, WENDY.
LAVERNE ENTERS WITH ABIGAIL.

LAVERNE

And Big Abigail has little Wendy with her.

HARRY

My babies have babies. (LOOKS FLUSTERED.) God! I feel old.

ABIGAIL

I'm not a baby anymore, doctor. I'm all grown up and have been married and divorced already.

HARRY

Boy, you have been busy since I last treated you for the mumps.

ABIGAIL

(ACTS UPSET, NERVOUS.) Doctor, I just moved back to Miami after my divorce and I always remember you as being such a nice man, and, well. (PAUSE) I need a doctor for Wendy.

HARRY

(CONFUSED BY HER NERVOUSNESS.) I would be happy to be Wendy's doctor. Is there something specifically wrong, or is this just a check up?

ABIGAIL

I think she might have a head cold or something.

She seems a bit dizzy when she walks, and she
falls down a lot.

HARRY

(SMILES.) I think I can explain that by
heredity. As I remember, you fell down a lot too
when you were a kid.

ABIGAIL

(NERVOUS LAUGH.) I guess you could be right,
Doctor

LAVERNE

(SHE REACHES FOR WENDY.) I'll take the little
darlin' and get her vitals for the doctor.

LAVERNE TAKES WENDY AND SETS HER ON THE FLOOR. LAVERNE TAKES
THE SWEATER OFF WENDY, THEN ROLLS UP WENDY'S SLEEVE. PLAINLY
SEEN ON WENDY'S ARM ARE LARGE BRUISES. LAVERNE AND HARRY
EXCHANGE SHOCKED AND CONCERNED LOOKS.

(DISSOLVE TO:)

EMPTY NEST

"Harry Isn't Houdini"

ACT ONE

Scene 1

(FADE IN:)

INT. HALLWAY, IN FRONT OF LAVERNE'S DESK - LATER THAT
AFTERNOON

LAVERNE AND HARRY ARE STILL STUNNED AND ARE STANDING BY
LAVERNE'S DESK.

LAVERNE

Those bruises couldn't have been caused by
falling, could they?

HARRY

No way, but that's little Abigail. She's so
quiet, shy, and nice. I knew her parents.

LAVERNE

You have to report her. You can't get involved,
you simply must report this case to the
authorities.

HARRY

But, I knew her parents so well, and they even wrote to me after they moved to New York. They seemed to love both their children very much.

(HE LOOKS THOUGHTFUL).

LAVERNE

Harry, you worry me when you get that look on your face. Why, the last time I saw that look I had to bail you out of the slammer when they arrested you in that protest march.

HARRY

Yeah, but those nurses were right to complain about the long shifts and bad conditions they had to work under. (PAUSE.) They deserved more pay too.

LAVERNE

But, Harry, the nurses were protesting against the doctors in YOUR hospital, meaning you too.

HARRY

I know. I was in deep doo doo with the hospital administration after that.

LAVERNE

But, that was then, and now is now, so don't get involved in this any more than just doing what you should.

HARRY

I know. I know. I'm not going to get involved, Laverne. I'm going to do the right thing.

LAVERNE

Do you want me to get the child welfare people on the phone for you?

HARRY

Tomorrow will be soon enough, besides, they're probably closed now anyway.

LAVERNE

(LOOKING CROSSLY AT HARRY.) Harry, what are you going to do?

HARRY

I kind of invited her to dinner tonight.

LAVERNE

(EXASPERATED.) It's quittin' time, and I'll see you in the morning. (PAUSE.) You'll make that call then, right?

HARRY

Sure, Laverne, sure.

(DISSOLVE TO:)

ACT ONE

Scene 2

INT. HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - LATER SAME NIGHT

HARRY AND CAROL ARE SEATED ON THE SOFA. ABIGAIL IS SEATED ON A CHAIR FACING THEM. THE THREE OF THEM ARE TALKING TOGETHER. WENDY IS PLAYING WITH A LARGE STUFFED BEAR IN FRONT OF CAROL. THEIR DOG IS LAYING BY THE SOFA.

CAROL

(TO WENDY.) It looks like you enjoy large stuffed animals.

WENDY

(NODS HER HEAD.) Yeah.

HARRY

(POINTING TO THE DOG.) We had this one stuffed
years ago.

ABIGAIL

(LOOKING AT THE DOG.) I thought it was alive.

HARRY

It's just a trick, done with mirrors. His eyes
seem to follow you when you move around the room.

CAROL

Don't let him fool you. That dog is daddy's
pride and joy. He takes it everywhere he goes.

(PAUSE) It just won't go very far.

HARRY

(PATS THE DOG.) This finely tuned canine machine
can out perform even the most active member of
this house.

THE DOG LIFTS ITS HEAD, THEN LETS IT FALL BACK TO THE GROUND.

CAROL

Please daddy, you make it sound as if this is a
mortuary.

WENDY

I like dogs, but I like big soft stuffed animals

best.

CAROL

I have a lots of stuffed animals upstairs, if
you'd like to see?

WENDY

(NODS HER HEAD.) Yeah.

HARRY

A woman of few words, but she knows what she
wants.

CAROL

Daddy! That sounds like a perfume commercial.

HARRY

(LIFTING UP THE LARGE STUFFED BEAR.) Bear
essence, the scent that leaves you senseless.

(HE PRETENDS TO HAVE THE BEAR ATTACK HIM.)

CAROL LAUGHS, TAKES THE BEAR WITH ONE HAND, WENDY WITH THE
OTHER AND LEAVES.

ABIGAIL

(LAUGHS.) You were always great to visit, you
would always make everything seem better.

UNSEEN BY THE OTHERS, CHARLIE PEEKS INTO THE LIVING ROOM FROM THE DINING ROOM.

HARRY

(SERIOUS FACE.) Yea, well. (NERVOUS PAUSE.) Would you like something to drink. I have to go check on dinner, and I could get you something.

ABIGAIL

Some cold tea if you have any.

HARRY

I'll get it now. (HE STANDS.)

CHARLIE STANDS UP STRAIGHT AND ENTERS THE LIVING ROOM.

CHARLIE

Harry, old boy. (PATS HARRY ON THE BACK.) You must introduce me to this lovely young thing.

(ASIDE TO HARRY.) Well, ol' partner, glad to see you back in the saddle again. (HE CROSSES TO ABIGAIL.)

ABIGAIL

(STANDING IN FRONT OF CHARLIE AND EXTENDING HER HAND.) Hello, my name is Abigail.

CHARLIE

And, I'm delighted (TAKES ABIGAIL'S HAND AND KISSES IT SEVERAL TIMES, MOVING UP HER ARM.)

My name's Charlie, and do you believe in love at first sight?

WENDY COMES TEARING DOWN THE STAIRS AND CROSSES TO ABIGAIL.

WENDY

Mommy! Mommy! Come look at all the animals!

(WENDY TUGS AT ABIGAIL'S DRESS.)

CHARLIE

(NERVOUS.) As I was saying, I fell in love with this living room the first time I laid eyes on it.

ABIGAIL

(POINTING TO CHARLIE.) Wendy, this is Charlie, and he loves furniture.

WENDY

(SMILES AT CHARLIE.) Hello. I like my favorite chair in my bedroom, but I let my Pooh Bear sit on it more than I do.

CHARLIE

(SEMI-NERVOUS AND LOOKING AT ABIGAIL.) Yes, that's nice. I'm particular about who sits in my bedroom too.

HARRY

(MOCKING SURPRISE.) You are?

CAROL

(ENTERING THE LIVING ROOM.) Wendy, why don't you take your mother up to my room and show her all the animals while I help daddy get dinner on the table for all of us?

WENDY

(LEADING ABIGAIL TO THE STAIRS.) Mom! Carol has a great big lion that she said her boyfriend got for her at the fair by shooting all kinds of metal ducks.

CHARLIE

(LEANS TOWARDS CAROL.) If I only knew it might
turn you on, I too would take up hunting the
dreaded robo-duck.

HARRY

Enough, Charlie.

CHARLIE

(TO HARRY.) Boy, do you have the strangest
notion of a good time. (PAUSE.) I've heard of
taking work home with you, but not like this, ol'
pal.

CAROL

Charlie, leave before I find some way to kill
you. (GLARES AT CHARLIE.) If not that, then
at least I'll find a vet to neuter you.

CHARLIE

I can take a hint, no matter how subtle. (HE
LEAVES.)

CAROL

Daddy, we need to talk. (PAUSE.) Now.

HARRY AND CAROL EXIT TO KITCHEN

(DISSOLVE TO:)

ACT ONE

Scene 3

INT. HOUSE, KITCHEN - SAME NIGHT, SECONDS LATER

HARRY WALKS TO THE STOVE, PICKS UP A LARGE SPOON AND BEGINS STIRRING FOOD IN A LONG BAKING PAN ON TOP OF THE STOVE.

CAROL

Daddy, what's going on?

HARRY

I'm just having an old patient over for dinner.

Why do you ask?

CAROL

Because you're stirring the Lasagna.

HARRY

(PULLING THE SPOON OUT QUICKLY, AND LICKING IT.)

Oh. You're right. (HE BEGINS TO REARRANGE THE

NOODLES.) I suppose it could be some sort of an

Italian surprise now

CAROL

(TAKING OVER THE NOODLE MESS.) I'll make

something out of it, and heat it up in the microwave, but don't avoid the issue here.

HARRY

(SHRUGGING HIS SHOULDERS.) What issue?

CAROL

Wendy is being abused, and you know it. Why are she and her mother here? (PAUSE.) Is this another one of your, 'I can fix it', cases?

HARRY

You know, you sound more and more like your mother. Only, (POINTS TO THE PAN CAROL IS WORKING IN.) your mother would wash the noodles and start all over again in another pan.

CAROL

(ANNOYED.) Just get in there and do whatever you have to do, but remember, Wendy is the one who is in trouble, she needs your help the most.

HARRY

No, they both need my help in there.

CAROL

I guess so, but you know what I mean. Abigail is the adult, and she's responsible for her child's

welfare, only now you seem to have taken that on
for yourself.

HARRY

(SAD EXPRESSION) I know. I just hate to see
either one of them suffer any more.

CHARLIE ENTERS THE KITCHEN FROM THE DINING ROOM.

CHARLIE

I can't leave, even on pain of becoming
genderless.

CAROL

(SMILING AT CHARLIE.) I'm glad you decided to
have that little operation after all. I
understand it does wonders for people with your
personality defect.

CHARLIE

(ANGRY.) Very funny. And, I have not decided to
have any such operation.

BARBARA ENTERS THE KITCHEN THROUGH THE BACK DOOR. SHE PAUSES
AND LOOKS AT EVERYONE THERE. HARRY AND CAROL GIVE BARBARA A
SURPRISED AND WORRIED LOOK.

BARBARA

What's the looks for? Did I do something, or is it Charlie.

CHARLIE

What is it with this family! A fellow shows a bit of libido once in a while, and next thing they want to do is snip him in his prime.

BARBARA

(A LITTLE CONFUSED.) It's not you I was talking about. (POINTING TO HARRY AND CAROL.) They are the ones who look like something's going on.

CHARLIE

(TO HARRY.) Look, all I wanted was to borrow your movie projector, remember?

HARRY

(SLAPS HIS FOREHEAD WITH HIS PALM.) Oh, right! I forgot. It's in the attic. Just pull down the stairs and it'll be on your right. (PAUSE) I think it's right beside the pet rock, and behind the lava lamp.

CHARLIE

(LOOKS AT HARRY) Boy, you always were a hip kind of guy.

HARRY

(ANGRILY) Do you want the projector, or what?

CHARLIE

I'm out of here, fellow. (HE BACKS OFF A FEW PACES.)

HARRY

I'll always remember that film projector. You know we took movies of you girls from the time you were born. Your grandparents gave us that outfit.

CAROL

All I remember is the two of us running down driveways with each and every one of our umpteen relatives over a ten year time span that seemed to last forever.

HARRY

Hey. They are moving pictures. I couldn't have you stand still for moving pictures, could I?

BARBARA

I hate to interrupt this misty look into the
past, but (TO CHARLIE.) I have a question.

CHARLIE

(A LITTLE ANNOYED TO BARBARA.) What now?

BARBARA

Why do you want to borrow our projector?

HARRY

(SUSPICIOUSLY.) To look at his old baby movies?

CHARLIE

(INNOCENTLY.) Sure.

CAROL

What? I can't see Charlie running down anybody's
driveway; unless he was chasing some sex crazed
bimbo.

CHARLIE

I'll have you all know that I am improving my
appreciation of the finer things in life by
renting some art films.

HARRY

(PRETENDING TO BE SHOCKED.) Please don't tell me
about THOSE kinds of films. Not in front of the

children.

BARBARA

(TO HARRY.) No. I'm grown up. I have to ask, don't ask me why, but my curiosity is getting the best of me lately.

CAROL

As you loving sister, I beg you not to ask.

BARBARA

The truth, no matter how brutal it may be, is always preferable to never knowing.

HARRY

May I interrupt here. That was a fine point of philosophy, but in the case of Charlie's film festival, I think Plato might agree with CAROL.

CHARLIE

You people live sheltered lives. My movie madness is limited to nothing but the finest first run art films gathered from around the world by one of the most sensitive collectors I have yet found.

BARBARA

And, dare I ask, who is that?

CHARLIE

(MOCKING.) And, you may dare ask. It is none other than Sparkling Sam, the come as you can mail order man.

CAROL

(COVERING HER MOUTH WITH ONE HAND.) I knew it! I knew it would be something like that.

BARBARA

Yeah. We arrest people like that, even in this town.

HARRY

Just, please, don't tell us any titles.

CHARLIE

I got two modern film classics; Three Men and a Babe, and Hanna Does Her Sisters.

HARRY

(POINTS TO THE ENTRANCE TO THE DINING ROOM.)

Just go get the projector, and be sure to clean it before you bring it back.

CHARLIE LEAVES

BARBARA

Why the strange lasagna for dinner?

CAROL

Dad decided to stir it.

BARBARA

Like I said when I came in here, what's going
on?

CAROL

Dad has decided to invite one of his patients
here to eat with us tonight.

BARBARA

The parents too?

HARRY

Just the mother. (PENSIVE PAUSE.) She's
divorced.

CAROL

She also beats her child.

BARBARA

(SURPRISED.) She what?

CAROL

She hits her child so hard that the little girl
has more than a few black and blue marks

HARRY LOOKS VERY SAD. HE WALKS TO A FAR KITCHEN COUNTER AND
LEANS AGAINST IT.

BARBARA

(TO HARRY) Dad. Why is she here?

CAROL

Dad must be thinking of being a psychiatrist again.

HARRY

(QUICKLY.) No. (MORE THOUGHT OUT.) I'm not.

I just wanted to bring it up with Abigail in my home, and not in the office. I remember her as being a shy and sensitive little girl, and I want to give her a chance to accept therapy before it is forced on her and the authorities take Wendy away from her.

CAROL

(SURPRISED A LITTLE.) That's right, they will take the child away from her.

HARRY

That's right, and since Abigail has just come from a messy divorce, I think this might just push her over the edge. It will be good for the

child in the short run, but it might be very bad
for Abigail forever.

BARBARA

(SHE CROSSES TO HARRY AND PUTS HER ARM AROUND

HIM.) Daddy, you have a great big heart, and
you always did want to help anybody and every-
body in trouble, but you cannot be a father to
everybody in trouble.

HARRY

But, Abigail is one of my patients, and she's
causing pain for another one of my patients,
Wendy. I have two patients who need me now,
and I am going to try to help them both.

CAROL

(SHE WALKS TO HARRY AND HUGS HIM.) I love you,
Dad. I'll help you. When we're through eating,
I'll take Wendy somewhere and you'll have time
alone with Abigail.

HARRY

Thanks. (SMILES.)

ABIGAIL WALKS INTO THE KITCHEN AS HARRY, CAROL, AND CAROL ARE
HUGGING EACH OTHER.

ABIGAIL

Is this some sort of a family ritual where

you brew a stew and hug the cook?

HARRY

No. (STILL SMILING BROADLY.) It's where a man has two beautiful and caring daughters who both appreciate their father's knowing and wise ways to the extent that they cannot contain their love and admiration for him any longer so they both spontaneously grab him and hug the bejesus out of him at odd moments of reflection.

CAROL

(LOOKING UP AT HARRY.) You can say that with a straight face?

ABIGAIL

I was amazed he could say that in one breath.

BARBARA

He usually does leave us all breathless.

ABIGAIL

I just came in to get my drink. I am real thirsty out there.

CAROL

I was just about to make the tea. Dad didn't have any tea made up.

HARRY

I'm sorry. I forgot all about your drink. Will
ice water be all right until the tea is brewed.

ABIGAIL

(NODS.) Fine.

CAROL

I'll bring it out to you in a minute.

ABIGAIL LEAVES CAROL GIVES HARRY A STEADY GLARE. HARRY SHRUGS
HIS SHOULDERS.

HARRY

What?

CAROL

You know darn well what. I'll bet that woman has
no idea that what she's doing to her own child is
wrong.

(FADE OUT:)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Scene 1

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER THE SAME NIGHT

HARRY, CAROL, ABIGAIL, AND WENDY ARE SEATED AROUND THE DINING ROOM TABLE, FINISHING THEIR MEAL. CAROL LOOKS TO HARRY, AND NODS TO HIM.

CAROL

I feel like ice cream after a meal like that.

HARRY

You don't look like ice cream, at least none
of the flavors I know.

CAROL

(WITH A SLIGHT FROWN.) Dad, I wish you'd improve
your repertoire of bad jokes.

HARRY

I don't have a repertoire of BAD jokes.

ABIGAIL

(PUTTING HER FORK DOWN.) That was delicious, but

I cannot decide what it was. It must be some sort of an Italian dish because it tasted somewhat like lasagna, but it looked like a fancy spaghetti.

CAROL

(QUICKLY.) It's an old family recipe.

ABIGAIL

I didn't know your family was Italian?

HARRY

My mother was a gypsy scared by an opera singer.

What you ate was Italian goulash, 'Verdechelle'.

CAROL

Actually it's punk lasagna.

HARRY

(TAKING THE BAIT.) And, (pause.) What's punk lasagna?

CAROL

It's just normal lasagna that you beat to death with a spoon.

HARRY

(WITH A DISGUSTED LOOK.) And you think I have a bad repertoire of jokes?

CAROL

While you're being insufferable, I'll take Wendy to the store to help me pick out some fancy ice cream for dessert. We won't be a minute.

WENDY

Oh boy! Ice cream.

CAROL AND WENDY LEAVE.

HARRY

(TO ABIGAIL.) Would you be more comfortable in the living room?

ABIGAIL

Let me help you with the dishes. It's the least I can do for you. You all have been so kind to me, and I don't deserve a bit of it.

HARRY

(STANDING.) Instead of doing the dishes, why don't we go out to the living room; I have something I need to talk with you about and I need to do it now before I chicken out.

ABIGAIL

(NERVOUS AND CAUTIOUS.) Well, okay. (SHE
STANDS.)

(DISSOLVE TO:)

ACT TWO

Scene 2

INT. LIVING ROOM - SECONDS LATER THE SAME NIGHT.

HARRY IS SEATED ON A CHAIR NEXT TO THE SOFA. ABIGAIL IS SEATED ON
THE EDGE OF THE SOFA NEAREST HARRY.

HARRY

Please let me talk for a while, just listen.

ABIGAIL

You're going to talk about Wendy, aren't you?

HARRY

No, I'm going to talk about you.

ABIGAIL

I'm a good mother. I'm better than my own
mother was to us kids.

HARRY

That's what I wanted to talk to you about. I
think you know that I know what you are doing
to Wendy.

ABIGAIL

What?

HARRY

You know what I mean.

ABIGAIL

No, what?

HARRY

You aren't making this any easier on me, you
know?

ABIGAIL

What?

HARRY

(SIGHS, THEN TAKES A DEEP BREATH.) When things seem to get out of hand, I mean when everything is going bad, and Wendy adds her crying and demanding to all that, how does that make you feel?

ABIGAIL

(SHOWS RECOGNITION OF THE DESCRIBED SITUATION.)
Oh boy, do I ever get mad at myself.

HARRY

Did your Mom ever have days like that?

ABIGAIL

Yeah, did she! I remember my brother and I used to run to the closet in the spare bedroom when Mom got mad. I ran up those stairs so fast I almost knocked my brother for a loop.

HARRY

But, you never did fall down, or knock your brother over?

ABIGAIL

No. He was my only friend. He looked after me

and fixed my hurts when Mom... (VOICE TRAILS
OFF.)

HARRY

When you mother beat both of you?

ABIGAIL

(SHE BEGINS TO CRY.) I can still remember one
time, just before my Dad left us for the last
time, Mom was so mad at us that she came at me
with the broken handle of the old shovel. I
put my arm up to keep her from hitting my face,
and my arm snapped. I broke it.

HARRY

No, your mother broke it. (PAUSE.) I remember
that broken arm too. What I also remember now is
that I didn't question your mother more closely
about it then. She was a fine woman, and well
thought of in this community. She was, like you,
so meek and mild that I never would have thought
she hit her children, let alone break her
daughter's arm.

ABIGAIL

I thought about telling someone, maybe you, but I

couldn't do that to my own mother. She wasn't all that bad, at least not all the time.

HARRY

Since this afternoon, I have been beating myself for not noticing what your mother was doing to you and your brother. I might have been able to help all three of you.

ABIGAIL

Don't feel bad, Mom had everybody fooled, you were no different.

HARRY

I know, and neither are you.

ABIGAIL

(SURPRISED.) What do you mean?

HARRY

You're acting just like your mother would have. I saw the bruises on Wendy's body back in my office when your daughter came in for an office visit with you. You were not clumsy as a child, and neither is Wendy.

ABIGAIL

(BEGINS TO CRY PROFUSELY.) I know! That's why my husband left me, and he wants custody

of Wendy, and he's gone to court to take her
from me and I don't know what to do because
I'll just die if I have to live without
Wendy.

HARRY

(HE MOVES TO ABIGAIL AND PUTS AN ARM AROUND HER.)

I know it can seem impossible, but with
therapy, and given enough time, you and Wendy
can live together as you would like to now.

IMPOSSIBLE AS IT SEEMS, ABIGAIL CRIES HARDER AND SLUMPS HER HEAD
ON HARRY'S SHOULDER. AT THIS TIME CHARLIE ENTERS
THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR, WITHOUT KNOCKING. HE IS UPSET AND
HOLDING A BURNED OUT PROJECTOR LAMP IN HIS HAND. HE STARES AT
THE BULB AND DOES NOT NOTICE HARRY AND ABIGAIL.

CHARLIE

I would like to have a word with the owner of
the defective projector.

HARRY

Please, come back another time.

CHARLIE

(NOT YET LOOKING UP.) Not so fast, bub! I have
six cinematic art patrons waiting in mid-sleaze.

(HE LOOKS UP, AND IS SURPRISED.) Oh. Am I

interrupting something juicy. Should I come back
in a few minutes, or what?

ABIGAIL

(SHE STANDS AND WIPES HER EYES. SHE STRAIGHTENS
HER CLOTHES, AS SHE STEPS AWAY FROM HARRY.) I
am acting like a fool. I apologize.

HARRY

You don't need to apologize. There's only one
fool in here, and it isn't us.

CHARLIE

Don't fool around with me, Harry. I must know if
you have another bulb for that antique you loaned
me.

HARRY

(ANNOYED.) No, I don't and I don't even think
they make that particular bulb anymore. That's
why we put it away in the attic. We converted
all our home movies to video tape years ago,
so why don't you get Sam, the mail order scum
king to convert his movies to tape?

CHARLIE

A good idea, but I don't think my irritated audience will wait for that to happen.

HARRY

That's too bad, why don't you go rent some substitutes from the salon of sleaze on the south side of Selma Street?

CHARLIE

Seriously, Sam sends the most sumptuous selection of sensuous cinema, and finding such a selection on the south side of Selma Street would simply be serendipity.

HARRY

(REACHING FOR CHARLIE'S THROAT.) Slip out of here before I slit your throat.

CHARLIE

(STEPPING BACK A FEW PACES.) You must simply tell me what the hell's going on here with crying mothers, and all the hugging. (PAUSE.) It might just be more plausible than the paused movies back home.

HARRY

Really, Charlie old pal, you must come again

another time.

CHARLIE

(OBLIVIOUS TO THE SITUATION.) When?

HARRY

(DISBELIEVING LOOK.) Well, I believe we're having a turn of the melania party on New Year's Eve. (PAUSE AS CHARLIE LISTENS SERIOUSLY.) Sort of to usher in the year two thousand, you know?

CHARLIE

(FINALLY CATCHING ON, HE BACKS QUICKLY TO THE DOOR.) I just hope the guys haven't found my designer collection of inflatables yet. (HE LEAVES.)

ABIGAIL

You do have a collection of unusual friends.

HARRY

But, they are my friends, and I would like you and Wendy to also be my friends.

ABIGAIL

(THOUGHTFUL.) I think I would like to be your friend. I need one now.

HARRY

The first thing your new friend will do is to make an appointment for you with a doctor friend of mine. She deals with families like yours all the time, and I know she could teach both of you something about your feelings and how to act on them.

ABIGAIL

I want to do better. I must do better than my mother, but it is so hard to change, I've tried.

(SHE BEGINS TO TEAR UP AGAIN.)

CAROL AND WENDY ENTER THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR. CAROL IS CARRYING A SMALL BAG OF ICE CREAM. ABIGAIL RUSHES TO WENDY AND PICKS HER UP IN HER ARMS AND HUGS HER. CAROL CROSSES TO HARRY.

CAROL

(WHISPERS INTO HARRY'S EAR.) Well, did you talk to her?

HARRY

(WORRIED LOOK ON HIS FACE.) Yes, we talked.

ABIGAIL

(AGITATED.) We have to go now. I had a lovely evening, but it's late and I have to get Wendy in bed.

CAROL

(TO ABIGAIL.) But, Wendy picked out her favorite flavor ice cream. Are you sure you can't stay for just a while longer; long enough for desert?

WENDY

(DEMANDING.) I wanna stay, mom. Please!

ABIGAIL

(SHE HUGS WENDY SO HARD WENDY SHOWS PAIN AND TRIES TO SQUIRM OUT OF ABIGAIL'S ARMS.) No, Wendy. We have to go home to grandma's house now. These people have heard enough of your complaining for now.

CAROL

(STARES AT ABIGAIL.) Okay. But, please take the ice cream with you, neither Dad nor I eat this flavor.

ABIGAIL

(TAKING THE BAG OF ICE CREAM, SHE DOES NOT LOOK CAROL OR HARRY IN THE EYES.) Thank you so much for the lovely evening and for the ice cream.

HARRY TUGS AT ABIGAIL'S SLEEVE, AND PULLS HER ASIDE. CAROL TAKES WENDY INTO THE KITCHEN.

HARRY

(WHISPERS TO ABIGAIL.) You know, I'm not going to let Wendy suffer any more. Your husband will get custody of her, and unless you admit to yourself that you do have a problem, nothing can prevent that from happening.

ABIGAIL

(NODS SILENTLY. PAUSE) I can't help myself.

HARRY

Yes you can. I expect you to go to therapy.

(PAUSE.) After all, I am the doctor, and that is the recommended course of treatment.

ABIGAIL

(LOOKS HARD AT HARRY.) I just don't know. I just don't know.

HARRY

I want you to talk to your mother too.

ABIGAIL

(SURPRISED) Why?

HARRY

Both of you need to go through the therapy, maybe
together for a while. I'll call your mother
tomorrow, even if you tell her tonight. (PAUSE)
I care about you, and I won't stop caring until
you're through this thing.

ABIGAIL

(BEGINS TO CRY AGAIN. SHE CALLS TO THE KITCHEN.)

WENDY!

WENDY ENTERS ALONE. ABIGAIL GATHERS HER DAUGHTER UP, AND THEY
BOTH LEAVE. CAROL ENTERS. HARRY AND CAROL STARE AT THE CLOSED
DOOR FOR A SECOND, THEN EACH LOOKS AT THE OTHER.

CAROL

I thought you said you talked to her. What did
you two talk about, the trouble in the Middle
East?

HARRY

We talked about Abigail's problem.

CAROL

And?

HARRY

And, maybe Abigail doesn't think she has a
problem. (LOOKS VERY SAD AND SHAKES HIS HEAD)

I thought I was getting through to her. I just

wish I could have seen this problem ten years ago.

CAROL

So now you have your problems and hers too. You shouldn't beat yourself about what you didn't clue in on ten years ago.

HARRY

I know a social worker at the child welfare office. I'll call her tonight. (PAUSES AS HE REACHES FOR THE PHONE AND LOOKS UP AT CAROL.)
I won't want to give up on my second generation, I just hope she doesn't move away tonight.

(DISSOLVE TO:)

ACT TWO

Scene 3

INT HARRY'S OFFICE - NEXT MORNING

HARRY IS LEANING AGAINST THE COUNTER IN FRONT OF LAVERNE'S DESK. HE IS ON THE PHONE. LAVERNE IS SEATED AT HER DESK LISTENING.

HARRY (ON THE PHONE)

I know it's a sad case, believe me I know. I

thought we'd lost her for sure last night.

(PAUSE) Yes, That's Dr. Weller the psychiatrist;
I've already spoken to her about the family.

(PAUSE.) Thank you (HE HANGS UP.)

LAVERNE

Well, tell me what happened.

HARRY

Like I told you first thing this morning, it
didn't go too well last night. I thought she
hadn't paid a bit of attention to me at all.

But, this morning she called me at five. That
was the best wake up call I've ever gotten.

LAVERNE

What's going to happen to Wendy?

HARRY

Wendy's going into a foster home for a while.
Abigail can visit her, but she cannot have
custody until the court and Dr. Weller say she
can.

LAVERNE

I think Abigail came to you because she always
trusted you. (PAUSE) I mean, she was ready to
make a change, and get outside help; she just
needed you to ease her along.

HARRY

That's real nice, Laverne. (SMILES) That
makes me very happy to think you feel that way
about me.

LAVERNE

Don't let it go to your head, sport.

HARRY

It won't. (LOSES HIS SMILE) I still can't
get that image of Abigail as a child, coming

into my office as a bruised, hurt child, and my
not realizing what was going on.

LAVERNE

(LOOKS SYMPATHETIC.) I'm sorry, Harry.

HARRY

It's not too bad. Elizabeth, my social worker
friend just told me on the phone that Abigail
has the desire to stop the behavior, and that's
half the battle.

LAVERNE

What will happen to Abigail if all this doesn't
work out?

HARRY

(VERY SAD EXPRESSION) She'll lose her daughter,
and I think she'll lose herself too.

LAVERNE

Like I said, don't let it go to your head, but
you did good this time.

HARRY

(SIGHS) There are no happy endings in these
situations, only satisfactory ones.

(FADE OUT:)

END OF ACT TWO