

Annnnnnd now she's quiet.  
I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done this.  
Just tell me to stop trying right now and it's over. I won't make you wait for a salad.  
Just say the word "Stop."  
Alice?

### Scene Ten.

*A bit later.*  
*Nelson has decided to pay a visit to Deborah and Ron, who is elsewhere.*  
*Deborah has a glass of wine.*

DEBORAH. I have to say that I think you're being really mature about this.  
NELSON. Right?  
DEBORAH. First you show concern for Ethan and invite him to dinner with you. Then you allow him to go on a date with your girlfriend—  
NELSON. It's not a date.  
DEBORAH. I call it like I see it.  
NELSON. I have this awful vision in my head.  
DEBORAH. Tell me.

*He steals himself, then tells his nightmare, getting more and more wound up:*

NELSON. Candles. Tablecloths. Live music, maybe someone on piano who really knows what he's doing. Alice and Ethan are drinking wine. *Red.* They've had a few glasses. He has a hand on the table. He says something sad and romantic, reminding her of happier times. Alice, almost by accident, puts her hand on his hand. It's an innocent gesture of human kindness. But then, when she touches him—  
DEBORAH. Sparks.

NELSON. What?!

DEBORAH. What?

NELSON. What'd you say?

DEBORAH. What?

NELSON. What do you mean "Sparks"?

DEBORAH. I don't—

NELSON. Electric sparks? You mean they reconnect? Romantic reconnection?

DEBORAH. I thought that's where you were headed in your "vision."

NELSON. I was gonna say that he grabs her hand and refuses to let go. He *takes* her.

DEBORAH. Oh. Wait. So you meant... You imagined that he physically attacks her?

NELSON. Well, um, I mean, that's a real possibility. You know?

DEBORAH. Eh...Ethan wouldn't do that. He's a sweet guy.

NELSON. Sweet?

DEBORAH. You're a sweet guy too.

NELSON. Right here. Right now. Ready? Here we go: Who do you like more: me or Ethan?

DEBORAH. I'm not answering that.

NELSON. ME! THE ANSWER IS "ME." C'mon! Even if you're lying!

I'm the one dating your daughter right now.

DEBORAH. Technically, I think Ethan is dating her right now.

*Silence.*

NELSON. Is Ron here?

DEBORAH. Why does it matter?

NELSON. No offense, but the more I talk to you, the worse I feel.

DEBORAH. I do take offense at that, Nelson.

NELSON. Gah, what do you think they're *doing*?

DEBORAH. Look, if you're antsy, why don't you just send her a texting message?

NELSON. A what?

DEBORAH. *Jesus. Get with the times, Nelson. A texting message.*

NELSON. What? A... Oh. I get it. Yeah. No um. I sent her a... message and...she hasn't responded.

DEBORAH. Alice is a polite girl. Her phone is probably just in her bag. She can't hear it.

NELSON. That's a common lie people use when they don't want to respond.

DEBORAH. It is?

NELSON. I sent her fourteen messages.

DEBORAH. Fourteen? Oof. How long have they even been on the date?

NELSON. Who knows.

DEBORAH. Ballpark.

NELSON. Twenty minutes.

DEBORAH. See, and there it is. I'm out of practice, but you may wanna take it down a few notches—

NELSON. Why? She's my girlfriend.

DEBORAH. Did you ever hear the expression, "The bricks can only topple if they've been stacked"?

NELSON. Actually. I don't think I have.

DEBORAH. Huh. It may have been something only my uncle said. I once saw him get into an argument with a cantaloupe.

NELSON. OK... So you think that for me to come on strong is to further push her towards him at this moment of least resistance?

DEBORAH. Bingo, and definitely! Think about it. This is the precise moment where he has the best shot he's going to get. He's with her. Alone. At a restaurant. You've already come across as sort of a wacko. If he keeps it together, Ethan Siegel's looking pretty good.

NELSON. Oh shit you're right. What did I do.

*Ron enters the room.*

DEBORAH. (*To hurt him.*) How's your head?!?

RON. I never want to drink again.

NELSON. How much did you drink?

RON. Four beers.

NELSON. And then what?

RON. What do you mean "And then what?" *I drank four whole beers, OK...*

NELSON. OK.

RON. So... What's up guys? Bah-bah-bah... Where's Alice?

NELSON. On a date.

RON. ETHAN?!

NELSON. And he looks happy.

DEBORAH. Nelson came over to talk to us.

RON. About what?

DEBORAH. Actually—I don't know. What do you—

NELSON. I would like to ask your permission to marry Alice.

*Silence.*

RON. Well, how many goats do you offer?

NELSON. I'm not joking.

RON. Sure you are.

NELSON. Why would that be a joke?

RON. Because if it's not a joke, that means she's been proposed to twice within a twenty-four-hour window.

NELSON. Yeah, once by a mental patient...and the other by her *longtime boyfriend.*

RON. Which one are you again?

DEBORAH. Ron!

RON. It was an easy joke. It would have been disrespectful to leave it hanging.

DEBORAH. Disrespectful to who?

RON. To whom?

DEBORAH. This is interesting. Did you know the medical definition of an asshole is someone who corrects someone else's grammar.

RON. Oh, is that what they taught you in med school? That's what an asshole is?