

THE VIEW FROM DUNHAM'S BLUFF

A one-act play by

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THE VIEW FROM DUNHAM'S BLUFF

Characters

ESTELLE, a middle-aged motel proprietor, desperately attached to her dying hometown

SULLY, a middle-aged bar owner, passively resigned to same

ARNOLD, an elderly local, retired and cynical

BOBBY, his long-time friend

DENISE, a young one-person tour operator, bubbly and single-minded

RODGER, an elderly tourist

HATTIE, his wife

EVIE, a nineteen-year-old woman traveling alone

Time

The present.

Place

A country tavern catering to the tourist trade.

THE VIEW FROM DUNHAM'S BLUFF

Mid-day. A country tavern, which from the rundown look of things has fallen off of late. The set includes a bar with three or four stools, an upholstered booth, and three or four small tables with chairs. An upright piano stands in one corner. A door leads outside, and a door behind the bar presumably leads to a kitchen and storage area.

Seeming to be immersed in daily routine, ARNOLD and BOBBY play cribbage at one end of the bar, near a window. BOBBY wears a beat-up hat throughout. SULLY mans the bar from the other end, doing typical chores in a desultory manner in between bouts of inspiration with a newspaper crossword puzzle.

ARNOLD

(Counting his hand, moving his peg.)

Fifteen-two, fifteen-four, and the run is five, and...there you go, Bobby Henderson--I am home!

BOBBY

(Throws his cards.)

Damn!

ARNOLD

(While he gathers the deck and shuffles.)

Oh, don't take it so hard, Bobby. The cards are like women--when they desert you, you can't beg nor plead, you can't bluff nor bluster. You have to pretend you have no interest in their kisses and that's how you woo them back.

BOBBY

Shut up, Arnold. What do you know about women?

ARNOLD

I know women like the back of my hand.

BOBBY

You know women like the hair on the palm of your hand.

ARNOLD

You hear that, Sully? My friend Bobby's resorting to cheap innuendo to mask his complete lack of skill at cribbage.

SULLY

(Without looking up from his paper.)

Bobby's on to something, Arnold.

(MORE)

SULLY (CONT'D)

Your frantically poking your peg into one hole after another, sounds like overcompensation for sexual inadequacy.

BOBBY snorts.

ARNOLD

And you're handing out free psychology now?

SULLY

Not free at all. I can't keep your glasses full, you have to leave.

ARNOLD

All right, bring me and my unlucky friend Bobby another round.

SULLY gets up to draw another two beers. While ARNOLD deals, BOBBY peers out the window.

BOBBY

Look. Here she comes.

ARNOLD and BOBBY split their attention as they organize their hands.

ARNOLD

She tries to hide it, but she's taking it hard.

BOBBY

And who ain't? It's tough to give up on your home town.

ARNOLD

She and Bill put a lot into their properties the past two years. Too much, you ask me.

SULLY

Heard she had an offer on the motel, though. Fellow from Jersey. Came out to look it over last week, then bid on it.

ARNOLD

She should take it. No sense fighting the inevitable. Get out while there's still something you can take with you.

BOBBY

You going to piss or play?

ESTELLE enters, awkwardly.

ESTELLE

Damn it, Sully, almost broke my neck on that top step again.

SULLY

(Not going to bite.)

Afternoon, Estelle.

ESTELLE

Well, when you going to fix it? You know it's customary to have steps of equal height.

ARNOLD

That's Sully's designated-driver test.

ESTELLE

Hey, Arnold. Bobby.

They acknowledge her without pausing their card play.

SULLY

(Reading.)

"Dinosaur desert." Four letters, ends with an i.

ESTELLE

Gobi. Gee-o-bee-eye. And don't change the subject. Why you try to put me in the emergency room every time I stop in?

SULLY

You're relentless, Stella. How about a beer?

ESTELLE

[glen-MORE-unh-gee]

Prefer a touch of Glenmorangie, you don't mind.

SULLY

Glenmorangie, Glenmorangie, uh...

(Lowering his voice.)

...well, Estelle, there's that little matter of your...you know.

ESTELLE

I know, my unpaid tab. And you're a sweetheart, Sully, to be so patient. I'll settle up with you soon as circumstances improve, you know I will. Bill and I are no deadbeats. We believe in meeting our obligations. Might take a little time, is all.

SULLY

I understand. It's just, well, Bill was in last night and got to reminiscing...

ESTELLE

(Wearily.)

Say no more. I'm the one had to pour him into bed. Give me a tap instead.

SULLY

(Drawing a glass.)

Any takers for your place?

ESTELLE

Guy from New Jersey made an offer, but I wouldn't let Bill take it.

SULLY

Why not?

ESTELLE

The guy's credit report was bogus. Bill wanted to take the chance, I said no.

SULLY

You might not get many more offers.

ESTELLE

That doesn't mean I should take the first loser comes along.

SULLY

Angela and I might. We're thinking we'd sell the bar for whatever we can get, try our chances somewhere else.

(Realizes he's depressing her further.)

But, hey, you never know. Maybe things are going to turn around. Didn't I see a couple of cars in your lot yesterday?

ESTELLE

Tourists desperate for directions. That'd make a great epitaph, wouldn't it? "Looking for someplace else."

SULLY

Don't forget there was that tour bus come through here three days ago.

ARNOLD

Didn't stop though, did it?

ESTELLE

It would've if we put some effort into advertising around here.

SULLY

Denise said she might bring a group by today.

ESTELLE

When they stop in, we should entertain them with some facts. People just need to hear a little bit about our local attractions.

BOBBY

What attractions?

ARNOLD

My ESP--Extraordinary Sexual Prowess.

BOBBY

Too late for that, you broken-down old goat, she means coming attractions.

ARNOLD

Sully's psychological analysis then.

BOBBY

As penetrating as your sexual prowess.

ESTELLE

Dunham's Bluff.

ARNOLD

What? Dunham's Bluff is ten years out of fashion.

ESTELLE

Still got a view second to none. The surf, the rocks, the beach. From the top of the bluff, the horizon looks like the edge of the universe. You can see past forever.

BOBBY

You should write the advertising, Estelle.

ESTELLE

Maybe I will. All we need is to get the town together, pool our resources, and invest in a little marketing campaign.

SULLY

(From his puzzle.)

Help me out, Estelle--"Filene's basement locale."

ESTELLE

Letters?

SULLY

Six, third is "S."

ESTELLE

Boston.

SULLY

(Writing.)

Thank you very much...OK, what's the theme for your ad campaign?

ESTELLE

How about: "Lose yourself in the view from Dunham's Bluff".

ARNOLD

Yeah: Get lost in Dunham.

ESTELLE

No, no, think of it: Dunham, City with a View of Forever.

SULLY

You're dreaming, Estelle. The world turned its back on this place a decade ago. The future drives the freeway bypass like everybody else now. Tourists don't want a quiet night's sleep on the ocean when they can go thirty miles down the road and lose their entire nest egg at a fancy casino.

ESTELLE

Don't undervalue what we have here.

SULLY

Much as I love the place, Stella, I've come to realize our rocks, sand, and water are no different from all the other forgotten ruins along the coast.

ESTELLE

We have our heritage.

SULLY

You call that a heritage?

ESTELLE

Tradition then, our history.

SULLY

Look, Estelle, I want to restore Dunham's Bluff to prosperity as much as you do, but we got to be realistic. Practical.
(*To ARNOLD and BOBBY.*)

What do you boys think of our tradition?

BOBBY

(*Indicating ARNOLD.*)

Which one--the drinking-all-day tradition or the mumbling-nonsense tradition?

ARNOLD

He means the bluff tradition.

ESTELLE

Yeah, the bluff. What's to be ashamed about the bluff?

ARNOLD

(*Laughs in disbelief.*)

You're kidding.

ESTELLE

I am not. Lots of places have places like the bluff.

SULLY

Name one.

ESTELLE

San Francisco. The bridge, the Golden Gate Bridge. They keep count. It's up over a thousand now, official. God only knows the real number.

SULLY

I don't think that's quite what pulls them in to San Francisco, Estelle.

ESTELLE

Doesn't hurt.

SULLY

You are out of your mind.

Door opens and DENISE enters leading RODGER and HATTIE, an elderly married couple. DENISE has the easy exuberance of a woman accustomed to others' attention.

DENISE

Here we are--take it easy on the steps. Sully's Bar and Grill, home of the freshest seafood on the coast. There's Sully, everyone. Say hi.

The geezers wave and say hello as if meeting a true celebrity. EVIE, an attractive woman about 20 years old, enters behind them quietly, and attempts to become invisible.

SULLY

Welcome to Dunham, folks. You look parched. What can I get you?

DENISE

Ice tea for me, please, I'm driving. Rodger?

RODGER

Gin and tonic for the missus and I'll have bourbon on the rocks.

DENISE

(To EVIE.)

And you, dear, what'll you have?

EVIE

(Sits at a distant table while the others take seats closer to the bar.)

Nothing for me, thanks...Well, maybe some water.

ESTELLE

What do you think of our City with a View of Forever?

DENISE

Everyone: Estelle Thompson, proprietor of the Sea Breeze Suites, which we passed on the edge of town.

Head nods and murmured acknowledgments all around, informally including BOBBY and ARNOLD.

DENISE (CONT'D)

The view. That's just what I was telling the group, Estelle, the view from the bluff is magnificent.

ESTELLE

So's the history. Founded by Frederick Dunham in 1803. Bivouac site during the Revolutionary War. There's been a Sully on this spot since before World War I, starting with this one's great-great-grandfather, Patrick Eden Sullivan.

RODGER

Get to the good stuff, will you?

SULLY

Harry Truman's limousine had a flat here in '47.

DENISE

Come on, Estelle, the bluff. They want to hear about the bluff.

SULLY

Me too.

DENISE

I already told them the number one-fourteen.

SULLY

Official. Second only to the lure of the City by the Bay.

ESTELLE

(Taking a deep breath.)

Well, it is true. Dunham is a center for pilgrims of a sort.

HATTIE

Grim pilgrims, is what I hear.

SULLY

That's right, suicide attracts the worst of the copy-cat killers. Go ahead, Estelle, tell us how it all began.

ESTELLE

(Hesitant, stalling.)

You may have noticed the prominent headland that Dunham is situated on, Dunham's Bluff. A limestone outcropping that rises more than two hundred feet above the sea.

(MORE)

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

Offering a view of the last unspoiled stretch of coastline in the country.

SULLY

Breath-taking view for some, you might say.

ARNOLD and BOBBY take a break between hands to listen.

DENISE

But it offers more than a panorama.

DENISE gestures to ESTELLE to continue. Furiously casting about for an idea, ESTELLE meets SULLY's eye.

ESTELLE

Which brings us to the tragic tale of Angela...Glenmorangie.

BOBBY stifles a snort. ESTELLE warms up and is soon on a roll.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

Angela Glenmorangie inherited twenty million dollars when her father died. It was more than a hundred years ago, about the time the first Sully arrived here. Angela was raised among the New York elite, and her coming-out party was the largest social event of the year.

HATTIE

Oooh, I love a cotillion.

ESTELLE

But thirty years after her debut she was still unmarried and alone.

RODGER

Poor dear.

ESTELLE

One day a handsome young stranger appeared at the Glenmorangie estate near here. He was a drifter by the name of Robert Henderson.

ARNOLD pokes BOBBY.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

He was looking for work and wondered if Angela had jobs that needed doing. She did.

HATTIE

Not a good sign.

ESTELLE

The stranger worked hard and within a week worked himself into Angela's bed.

HATTIE

Don't trust him, honey...

RODGER

Sign of a scoundrel.

ARNOLD

You got that right.

ESTELLE

A month later, July 19, 1896, Robert Henderson and Angela Glenmorangie were married in Boston. They honeymooned...in the Gobi Desert.

RODGER

I think I see where this is going...

HATTIE

And it's not good.

ESTELLE

When they returned from overseas, Robert stayed in New York on business while Angela continued on to her estate. Soon Angela learned from her attorneys that her bank accounts were suddenly empty. And Robert Henderson was never heard from again.

HATTIE

I knew it.

RODGER

Good riddance.

ESTELLE

One year to the day that Angela discovered herself abandoned and penniless, she walked out on the bluff that now carries the town's name. She never returned. The next morning searchers found her broken body on the rocks below.

DENISE

(Translating into "brochure-ese".)

And that's how Dunham's Bluff became a mecca of misfortune, a site for star-crossed lovers of all kinds to consign their fates to the Almighty.

SULLY

Think of Dunham's Bluff as sort of the Golden Gate to Forever.

DENISE

Oh, show them the jar, Sully. I told them you had a jar.

SULLY

You sure?

DENISE

Yes, I promised. Please?

SULLY shrugs, then turns to a locked cabinet behind the bar and begins to open it.

DENISE (CONT'D)

Now, folks, this is the really mystical part of the story. Since...

(With a subtle nod to ESTELLE for her contribution to this part.)

...Angela Glenmorangie leaped to her death, scores of others, singly or in pairs, have followed. But what's really special is that many of those unhappy souls stopped right here at Sully's before the end.

RODGER

How do you know that?

DENISE

Because of what they left behind.

SULLY sets a pickle jar on the bar. It's half full of gold rings.

SULLY

One hundred fourteen rings in here, folks.

DENISE

Engagement, wedding, graduation--you name it, Sully's got 'em.

HATTIE

But how?

RODGER

Wait a minute. You didn't...?

SULLY

No, sir, we don't steal from the dead. We found them all later, after they'd gone, right here on the bar or on one of the tables.

RODGER

But why...?

HATTIE

Such precious possessions.

DENISE

Here's my theory: You see, people contemplating suicide are full of doubts. They go back and forth over the pros and cons. When they finally decide, they seal their resolve by removing their rings. It's a rejection of all links to the past and claims on the future.

ARNOLD

A point of no return.

BOBBY

Yeah. Once the rings come off, they're flying out the door.

HATTIE

And you keep them--

RODGER

--How could you?

SULLY

Oh, we try to give them back. Usually the families say they don't want anything to remind them of the self-deceased.

DENISE

Sometimes no one answers the letter.

BOBBY

And sometimes you can't even tell who it was. The body ain't a body no more.

SULLY

As you can see, we don't sell the rings. Just keep them here as a memorial.

RODGER

(Peering into the jar from the top.)

If that don't beat all.

DENISE

Didn't I promise you an amazing story?

RODGER

Look, Hattie, some of them have inscriptions.

HATTIE

(Squinting through the glass.)

Sure, but I can't make out any of the words.

RODGER

(Gestures to the jar.)

Could we?

SULLY hesitates, looks at DENISE, who encourages him. SULLY opens the jar, offering it to RODGER. RODGER grabs a handful of rings and shares them with HATTIE. As they examine the rings one by one they return them to the jar. EVIE, mesmerized, reluctantly moves in to see better.

RODGER (CONT'D)

(Reading.)

Listen: "My darling Abigail."

HATTIE

Here's one says "Forevermore."

RODGER

"L and T--for better or worse."

HATTIE

"Scott, whose heart is one with mine." Oh, these are like windows into tragedy.

DENISE

My favorite in there is...

(Fluttering her hands and falling backwards as she assumes a character with theatrical ease.)

..."You are the wind beneath my wings".

BOBBY

Wasn't you going to write these all down, Estelle?

HATTIE

Oh, yes, I'd like to see that.

RODGER

Sure be a good read.

ESTELLE

I suppose I could.

HATTIE

Can we go out on the bluff now? I want to see the view of the sky and the birds.

RODGER

(Playfully.)

I don't know. With all this talk, Hattie and I might decide to seal our love and jump.

HATTIE

You just might get pushed instead--my better, your worse.

(To DENISE.)

What do you say? Do we have time for the bluff?

DENISE

Well, I'd love to, I really would, but if we're going to get in some slot-machine time before dinner, we should get going.

The group gathers its things. EVIE is distracted, withdrawn.

HATTIE

(To ESTELLE.)

It's a shame you don't have a museum or something. Personal anguish fascinates me. I'd love to spend some more time with these people, what makes them different from the rest of us.

RODGER

Get to know what made them snap.

DENISE

Yes, that's something to think about, isn't it, Estelle?

ESTELLE

Believe so.

All except EVIE ad lib good-byes. DENISE and the tour group exit, EVIE last.

SULLY

I had no idea you were so devious, Stella. That was quite a show. Made up out of whole cloth.

ARNOLD

Sully, I don't think your wife'd appreciate hearing she had an affair with old Bobby Henderson here.

BOBBY

And who the hell'd honeymoon in the Gobi Desert?

SULLY

Nothing but melodrama and cliché.

ARNOLD

Although I liked the part about Bobby disappearing.

ESTELLE

And so did our visitors--they ate it up. Which proves my point. We got the suicide rings, but we're not taking advantage of them. We come up with a few stories about these folks, advertise...

(Taps the jar.)

...and bingo! We got ourselves a true historical site.

BOBBY

Hey, think we could get government money to build a suicide theme park?

ARNOLD

Yeah, a pork barrel grant to make a silk hearse out of a sow's ear.

ESTELLE

I'm serious. We don't need a government handout. We have an untapped resource that's ready to exploit. All we have to do is advertise the history of Dunham's Bluff.

(Lifts RODGER's empty glass.)

That'll bring the tourists and their money back in droves.

BOBBY

Long shot if I ever heard one.

ESTELLE

We could do it if we work together. Forget about selling our homes and businesses and start marketing our tradition.

SULLY

I don't know. There's a lot I'd be willing to do to save Dunham. But the idea of promoting ancient history doesn't sound very promising.

ARNOLD

Count me out. I retired from lost causes the day I got divorced.

(Shuffling the cards.)

You playing, Bobby?

BOBBY

I'm broke.

ARNOLD

(Dealing.)

OK, one more game, loser has to sing "Auld Lang Syne."

Shaking his head, BOBBY reluctantly accepts his hand.

ESTELLE

What about it, Sully? Will you help me give marketing a try? Wait, don't answer. Talk to Angela. See what she thinks.

EVIE re-enters quietly.

SULLY

Sure, I'll ask her. I should warn you, though, selling the bar was her idea in the first place.

ESTELLE

(Notices EVIE.)

Hello. Forget something?

EVIE

No.

EVIE sits down at a table tentatively. Her affect is very flat at first. Only gradually does she become more emotional.

ESTELLE looks to see if the guys will get involved, but between the crossword puzzle and the card game, they're oblivious. Uncertainly, she crosses to EVIE.

ESTELLE

Miss the bus?

EVIE shakes her head.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

What happened?

EVIE

I...I told them to go on without me.

ESTELLE

Oh?

EVIE

I didn't want to go to a casino. Those places depress me.

ESTELLE

I see. Staying the night?

EVIE

You have room at your motel?

ESTELLE

Take your pick.

(Beat.)

You all right?

EVIE

Oh, yes. Just a little tired.

ESTELLE

(Not knowing what else to do.)

Mind if I join you?

EVIE

No, go ahead.

ESTELLE
Pleased to meet you...

ESTELLE turns to EVIE quizzically, offers her hand, which EVIE takes halfheartedly.

EVIE
Evie Prescott.

ESTELLE
Drink? Maybe some wine before dinner?

EVIE
Sure, that'd be nice.

ESTELLE
Sully, how about another tap for me and a glass of white wine for Evie. Put it on my tab.

SULLY gives ESTELLE a look. She gestures at him to not make a scene, then takes a chair at EVIE's table.

EVIE
Told the others I'd catch up later.

ESTELLE
Might as well sample Dunham's attractions.

EVIE
Oh, I'm not in the mood for fun.

ESTELLE
Then you're in the right place. What'd you think of Angela Glenmorangie's story?

EVIE
Interesting. I had no idea.

ESTELLE
Got more details if you like.

SULLY
Maybe later, Estelle. She's here to relax, not take notes.

After SULLY delivers the drinks, he returns to the bar and his newspaper, out of earshot.

ESTELLE
So what have you heard about Dunham's Bluff?

EVIE
The suicide part. I didn't know there were so many though.

ESTELLE

Yeah, makes you wonder where suicides get the idea they're all alone.

EVIE

It must be awful living around here.

ESTELLE

It is, now that the glory days are over. Haven't had a jumper in more than ten years.

EVIE drops her head, begins to weep softly. The others don't hear.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

What? Evie, what's the matter?

EVIE shakes her head vigorously. ESTELLE tentatively puts her arm around EVIE, who turns into her shoulder and sobs harder.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

You go ahead, honey. It's OK.

ESTELLE looks around uncomfortably to see if anyone's noticed. No one has. Fumbles in her pocket for a fistful of tissues.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

Here.

EVIE

I'm so sorry.

EVIE wipes her eyes and nose, sniffing throughout. ESTELLE isn't sure if she wants to get into this.

ESTELLE

Hey, it's not healthy to hold it in.

EVIE

Thank you. I should be more discreet.

ESTELLE

About what, sugar?

(Beat.)

You don't mind my asking.

EVIE

I don't want to unload my troubles on you.

ESTELLE

Evie, sweet, you met my Bill you'd know I can carry a load and then some.

EVIE

I'm so confused.

ESTELLE

Aren't we all, honey.

EVIE

How old do you think I am?

ESTELLE

(Shrugs.)

Twenty, twenty-two.

EVIE

Would you be surprised to hear I'm only nineteen and going to be married?

EVIE holds out her left hand to show her engagement ring to ESTELLE, who examines it.

ESTELLE

Nineteen. That's not so unusual.

EVIE

I don't recommend it.

ESTELLE

Oh?

(Beat, deciding it's an opening.)

Who's the groom?

EVIE

A man named Randall Gafney.

ESTELLE

And he is...?

EVIE

Not at all what I had in mind.

ESTELLE

Honey, Bill and I been married twenty-eight years, and I couldn't tell you why either.

EVIE starts to cry again.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to make you feel worse.

EVIE

Worse is impossible.

ESTELLE

You want to tell me about it? How it came to happen.

EVIE

My mother's forcing me.

ESTELLE

Hmmm. She... must have a reason.

EVIE

She's trying to keep the family business going. She took over when my father died. She didn't have a head for it, though. Now to avoid bankruptcy, she wants me married to Gafney.

ESTELLE

And...that's not a pleasant prospect...

EVIE

The only thing Gafney has going for him is money. I'd flat out refuse him if my mother didn't drag my brothers into it. She says I'd be condemning them to a life of poverty.

ESTELLE

She's really counting on you, huh?

EVIE

Mother said not marrying Gafney would jeopardize the entire family's future. She says they're doomed if the business goes under and I'd be to blame for their misery.

ESTELLE

You're going through with it then.

EVIE

No, I'm running away. Can't you tell?

ESTELLE

(Skeptically.)

And you came to Dunham.

EVIE

It just seemed like the kind of place to stop and catch my breath before they come looking for me.

ESTELLE

Well, no one'll think to check here.

EVIE

Dunham's beautiful.

ESTELLE

We think so.

EVIE

I've always dreamed of a place like this. Quiet. Hidden.

ESTELLE

Yeah.

(Beat.)

You know, Evie, we're trying to build the tourist trade around here.

EVIE

Why? You'll destroy everything that makes this place special.

ESTELLE

Special is all well and good until it comes to making a living. Don't you wonder how you stay alive in a ghost town?

EVIE

Hadn't thought of it that way.

ESTELLE

I don't have the luxury. I was raised here and I can't ignore the decline.

EVIE

Why not just leave?

ESTELLE

That's what Sully keeps saying. But he's an outsider, on account of going away to college for a while. The rest of us, the real natives, we believe we have a responsibility to the town. Thick or thin.

EVIE

I see.

ESTELLE

That hurricane came through here five years ago? Took the roof right off this place. Didn't matter. Neighbors replaced it in 24 hours.

EVIE

I envy you.

ESTELLE

Nothing good happens unless everybody recognizes their duty to pitch in. It's a tradition around here: I'll help you today because I might need your help tomorrow.

EVIE

That must be hard to live up to.

ESTELLE

Not really. We're all kind of like a family--you know: He ain't heavy--he's my brother. Remember that?

EVIE doesn't.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

(Beat.)

So. Tell me about the good in your life.

EVIE

I can't. All I can think about is the wedding.

ESTELLE

You said you had brothers.

EVIE

Three.

ESTELLE

I bet they look up to you.

EVIE

(Bursts into tears.)

All they care about is sports and video games. I doubt they even know I'm gone. And when they do notice, they'll be angry more than anything.

ESTELLE

Oh, that can't be true.

EVIE

They think I owe them. The boys come right out and say since I'm the oldest, I have to fill in for my dad. Make sure there's a family business to support them. They're not expecting to have to work. They say since I'm a girl, it's not like I'm supposed to be anything besides a wife anyway.

ESTELLE

Marriage can be very fulfilling.

EVIE

With a man like Gafney? How can you say that?

ESTELLE

Well, I don't know. You haven't given me much to go on.

EVIE

What can I say about him? That he's handsome--very, if you like furry men. That he's smart--clearly, as he'll constantly point out to you. That he's kind...

(Beat, then bitterly.)

Well, that wouldn't be at all truthful.

ESTELLE

Evie, listen to me. Think of better things.

EVIE

Like what?

ESTELLE

Well, you said Randall'd bring new capital to the family business. That's like a dowry in reverse. It means a lifetime of luxury for your family.

EVIE

What about my comfort? Don't I matter? I'm just a meal ticket to them.

ESTELLE

(Beat, then with a slowly growing sense of purpose.)

Evie...why're you here?

EVIE

What do you mean?

ESTELLE

People don't end up in Dunham by chance. You have to have it as your specific destination. Only way you'll put up with the bad roads and incompetent signage along the way.

EVIE

Yes, I said I'd heard about Dunham's Bluff, remember? I wanted to see it. I heard it was pretty.

ESTELLE

There are other pretty bluffs along this stretch of coast.

EVIE

Maybe I was curious. About the... the people who... jumped.

ESTELLE

And have you been out on it?

EVIE

Not yet. I only saw it from the highway.

ESTELLE

It's very impressive out on the headland.

EVIE

So I hear.

ESTELLE

The seagulls flying below you give you a fresh view of your place in the world. Makes you think you might have a totally different life if you only knew what steps to take.

EVIE

Nothing good ever happens to me.

ESTELLE

Our meeting each other. That was fortunate.

EVIE

I appreciate your listening to me.

ESTELLE

(Beat.)

Evie, did you notice those two gentlemen over there?

EVIE

Uh-huh, they were here when I first walked in.

ESTELLE

Well, they have an interesting story, too.

EVIE

Oh?

ESTELLE

Yes. You can't tell just by looking at them, but they have a secret.

EVIE

Really.

EVIE starts watching ARNOLD and BOBBY with new interest.

ESTELLE

Can you guess what it is, Evie? The secret.

EVIE shakes her head, eyes on the old boys.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

They're unconsummated lovers.

EVIE

No.

ESTELLE

True. This part of the country, folks aren't so tolerant. Their kind of love's impossible here.

EVIE

How do they...manage?

ESTELLE

Not well. As I said, family is very important around here. Families are close knit, proud. But they don't allow for much individuality.

EVIE

Families are like that.

ESTELLE

Exactly. Bobby...Filene and Arnold Jersey have lived all their lives here. Between the rock of family and the hard place of personal dreams.

EVIE's eyes are on BOBBY and ARNOLD, who are nearing the end of their game.

EVIE

How awful. They should go, move somewhere else.

ESTELLE

Run away? No, no, don't you see? They don't think of it as being unable to express their love for each other. They think of it as loving each other more through sacrifice.

EVIE

I can't bear the thought of the future. I can't handle it.

ARNOLD slams the winning cards on the table, and BOBBY bangs the table in disgust. We can't make out their banter, but it's quite animated.

ESTELLE

Sure you could, if you keep the big picture in mind. That's how Bobby and Arnold survive--they place their ties to family and the community above all else. The only concession they make to their secret is to end each day with the song that brought them together on New Year's Eve fifty years ago.

(Beat.)

That kind of dedication's an inspiration, wouldn't you say?

As EVIE watches them, she rubs her fingers nervously.

EVIE

I... don't know what you're talking about.

ESTELLE

I think you do, Evie. I think you know your duty. Your mother doesn't mean to make you suffer--she just has to think of the whole family. And sure, your brothers might seem callous, but they're young. They're taking you for granted now, but in time they'll be grateful for the financial security you'd give them.

ARNOLD drags BOBBY to the piano. ARNOLD sits and begins to play "Auld Lang Syne." BOBBY starts out halfheartedly, but ARNOLD eggs him on. With the first recognizable notes, EVIE begins to cry again. ESTELLE shudders.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

There they go. Accepting their fate, one day at a time.

EVIE buries her face in her hands, sobbing.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

Evie, people don't walk in this door by accident. They come here with a purpose, a mission. You could be sitting in a casino playing slots right now. But you didn't do that because you knew you had business here. Preparing for a new life with the man who'll ensure your mother's happiness and your brothers' comfort.

BOBBY and ARNOLD finish their song and prepare to leave.

EVIE

I'm not that strong. Every time I try to imagine going through with the wedding, I can't. Gafney's a pig.

ESTELLE

Oh, honey, you have to realize, what seem to be flaws now become, over time... personality.

EVIE

(Matter-of-fact.)

I hate him.

ESTELLE

No, no. He's still a bit of a stranger, is all.

(Beat.)

How old is Mr. Gafney?

EVIE

Thirty-two.

ESTELLE

There you go. Life expectancy being what it is, you'll have at least forty years to learn to appreciate your husband's positive qualities.

EVIE sobs uncontrollably, her hands writhing in her lap. ARNOLD and BOBBY pause to stare, puzzled, but ESTELLE surreptitiously waves them off. ARNOLD and BOBBY exit.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

Your gift to your mother and brothers--that's not something you should run away from. You should run toward it, embrace it.

EVIE

I don't think I can go through with it...

ESTELLE

Evie, it's time to grow up and accept Randall Gafney. His appearance, his attitude, his manners--those things mean nothing. Serving him as his wife, sharing his company for the rest of your life. That's the worthiest goal a woman could ask for.

(Beat.)

Isn't it, Evie?

ESTELLE lifts EVIE's face and stares into her eyes.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

I know what'll help you see how obligation can give meaning to your life.

(Beat.)

The view from the bluff is magnificent. It's a good place to think.

ESTELLE subtly pushes EVIE's glass forward. EVIE touches it for a moment, then impulsively gulps the wine over the next few lines.

EVIE

The sky. The birds.

ESTELLE

They'll focus the mind. Bring you insight.

EVIE

I'm not sure...

ESTELLE

Just give yourself time to reflect. You'll see. Up there, you'll find the strength to dedicate yourself to the bonds of family.

EVIE

I'm afraid.

ESTELLE

All the more reason to go on the bluff, let the sea breeze open your eyes.

(Beat.)

(MORE)

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

Something about the sight of the gulls beneath your feet makes you think their broad wings could carry you away to everlasting peace of mind.

(Beat.)

Evie, does anyone know you're here?

EVIE shakes her head.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

Then it's all up to you. You know, Evie, not many people face the kind of clear-cut decision you have with Mr. Gafney. For a girl with so many dependents, it's an easy choice.

EVIE twists her fingers in an agony of ambivalence.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

What do you say, Evie--how can you fight destiny?

At last EVIE straightens up, squares her shoulders, and takes a deep breath. She clasps ESTELLE's hands, squeezes them once, then rises quickly and exits. As EVIE crosses the threshold...

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

Watch your step.

ESTELLE watches her go, then gets up slowly, drained.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

Sully, I believe I'll have that single malt now.

SULLY

(Looking up from his paper.)

Estelle, we talked about that before. Let's keep your account at a manageable level for a while, at least until things start looking better for you.

ESTELLE

This ought to be worth something.

ESTELLE flips a small object through the air to SULLY, who catches it, surprised. SULLY holds the object up between his fingertips, looking through it at ESTELLE. It's EVIE's engagement ring.

SULLY

I'll be damned.

SULLY rushes to the window to look out, then heads for the door. ESTELLE grabs his arm as he goes past, stopping him.

ESTELLE

Are you sure?

SULLY

I run, I can catch her.

ESTELLE

Then what?

SULLY looks to the doorway, puts it all together.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

You can't save everybody, Sully. Sometimes you have to choose. And when it's between a stranger and the best interests of your own family and friends, well, that's not too difficult, is it?

There's a long pause while SULLY looks over the ring in his hand. Then he taps the ring on the bar before dropping it in the jar with the others. Then, heartily...

SULLY

Stella, your credit is restored.

SULLY grabs the Glenmorangie from the top shelf, pours two drinks. ESTELLE settles onto a bar stool.

ESTELLE

You see, Sully, that's where my thinking didn't go far enough earlier. Marketing isn't just advertising. It's also product development--in this case, our new specialty, historical re-enactments.

ESTELLE raises her glass in a toast.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

To the future of our scenic little town...

SULLY

How would Denise put it? A mental health spa. A breath-taking retreat from the world.

ESTELLE

A place where you can escape your troubles through the ultimate in conflict resolution.

ESTELLE and SULLY touch glasses.

SULLY

To Dunham's Bluff...

ESTELLE

...The Last Resort.

They drink. Go to black.

END OF PLAY