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PAMELA PALMER

a play by

David Ives

pamelapalmer072724.doc
post-Williamstown final

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PAMELA PALMER premiered in July 2024 at the Williamstown Theatre Festival (Jenny Gersten, Artistic Director). Walter Bobbie directed. Alexander Woodward was the scenic designer; Amanda Roberge the costume designer; Landon K. Elder the lighting designer; and Dan Moses Schreier the sound designer. Robbie Armstrong was the production stage manager.

The cast was as follows:

PAMELA PALMER.....	Tina Benko
THE DETECTIVE.....	Clark Gregg
THE MOTHER.....	Becky Ann Baker
THE HUSBAND.....	Max Gordon Moore

The characters:

PAMELA PALMER
THE DETECTIVE
THE HUSBAND
THE MOTHER

The setting: a beautifully furnished room is suggested. It may remind us of parlors in the manor houses of Golden Age whodunnits. A small gold-framed picture sits on a side table. There is a single entrance to the room through a portal upstage.

Time: the present.

NOTE: where a pause is indicated, the pause should be longer than a standard stage pause - maybe three times as long. Long enough for the audience to become aware of it.

SCENE ONE.

(Morning. Spring. PAMELA shows THE DETECTIVE in.)

PAMELA

Thank you so much for coming. Would this be all right, in here?

DETECTIVE

Looks good enough. Why not.

PAMELA

I love this room. It's so nice and bright. And having the garden right there is so fun.

DETECTIVE

Uh-huh. Satin upholstery. Real French windows. Very perfect. Anybody's bottom ever touch these chairs?

PAMELA

I sit in them all the time. Listening to music. Reading.

DETECTIVE

Murder mysteries? Country house, locked room, body on the floor?

PAMELA

Sometimes.

DETECTIVE

Well, you got the right setting. So did "Wishwood" come with the joint?

PAMELA

Wishwood. No, we named it that. I don't remember why. Maybe it's from a Henry James novel. I seem to recall it was my husband's idea.

DETECTIVE

I guess it's a mystery.

PAMELA

The garden's just coming into bloom. We could sit out there.

DETECTIVE

Have you ever been a model?

PAMELA

I'm sorry?

DETECTIVE

A clothes model, in the magazines, maybe on TV?

PAMELA

Oh, I have too many imperfections to be a model.

DETECTIVE

As who among us does not. I dunno, I just got this funny déjà vu feeling I've seen you someplace before...

(A pause.)

So. Pamela Palmer. Why am I here?

PAMELA

Yes. Well. As I say, it's kind of you to come all this way.

DETECTIVE

I'm not being kind. You sounded pretty desperate on the phone.

PAMELA

I'm sorry about that. I must have seemed in quite a state last night.

DETECTIVE

You mean sounding like you had a gun to your head? What you didn't say is why. Or whose gun. Or why I was supposed to come out here so early to your bright fun parlor.

PAMELA

It's rather hard to explain.

DETECTIVE

It always is.

PAMELA

You probably hear that every day. Would you care for a drink? There's liquor.

DETECTIVE

Ten a.m. is a shade early, even for me.

PAMELA

Really.

DETECTIVE

Why, do I stink of Jim Beam or something?

PAMELA

Maybe tea, or coffee?

DETECTIVE

I'm good. But you go ahead. You can smoke if it'll help.

PAMELA

I don't smoke.

DETECTIVE

No? You just dip your fingertips in nicotine?

PAMELA

I do occasionally sneak one, lately...

(DETECTIVE picks up the gold-framed picture and looks at it.)
Isn't it usually a drop-dead blonde?

DETECTIVE
I'm sorry?

PAMELA
Isn't it classically a beautiful mysterious woman with great legs who comes to your shabby little office? With a case you reluctantly accept?

DETECTIVE
You're a good-looking woman with nice legs. Is that what you wanted me to say?

PAMELA
No.

DETECTIVE
You look pretty mysterious to me. So far. My office isn't too shabby, by the way, or too little. Because I do charge people for my time. Plus extra for house calls to Greenwich.

PAMELA
I will pay you for this visit, regardless.

DETECTIVE
Good. I'll take the Degas ballerina. The one on the left.

PAMELA
Yes, well. I'm sorry. That one you can't have.

DETECTIVE
It's a long way from Akron, huh. All of this.

PAMELA
So you looked into me.

DETECTIVE
I'd be an idiot not to. And isn't that my job?

PAMELA
What did you find out?

DETECTIVE
You got a husband in the money business. Lotta charity work. Women's group. And a degree in classical French drama. Now that is not very Akron.

PAMELA
You have some terrible idea about Akron.

DETECTIVE
I read about it in Dante's Inferno.

PAMELA

I took up French because my father always promised us that we would live in France. We'd go boating on the Seine. I'd learn to dance... What's funny?

DETECTIVE

Well, it's a song, isn't it? Judy Collins? The father works in a mine, promises the girl they'll go to Paris? Learn to dance?

PAMELA

It's not a crime to know a song.

DETECTIVE

So you do know that song.

PAMELA

You know it somehow.

DETECTIVE

I didn't say it's a member of my family.

PAMELA

My father was a die cutter in a mill and he really did promise us Paris many times before he died - all too young. After never having gotten to see Paris, or the Seine, or much of anything else except Akron. Long before I...ever heard that Judy Collins song...

(Collects herself.)

I'm sorry.

DETECTIVE

You okay?

PAMELA

Yes. Fine. Really.

DETECTIVE

You were about to tell me why I'm here.

PAMELA

You understand this is all confidential.

DETECTIVE

Sure. Now you're gonna tell me what a strange case it is.

PAMELA

Am I that transparent?

DETECTIVE

Au contraire. I just been here lots of times before.

PAMELA

It's not really a case, as such. More of an investigation. Or a task. I thought of you because of the case that was in the news. You know the case I mean.

DETECTIVE

Yeah, I know the case.

PAMELA

Not that this case is similar, necessarily.

DETECTIVE

Good. I wouldn't want another case like that one.

PAMELA

Of course not, who would.

DETECTIVE

I don't like blood. I'm squeamish. Why? Have you got any?

PAMELA

I'm sorry?

DETECTIVE

Blood. As part of your "task"? What is this task, anyway?

PAMELA

Can I just ask, are you carrying a gun?

DETECTIVE

Why, am I gonna need one?

PAMELA

I don't think so.

DETECTIVE

Do you have a gun?

PAMELA

My husband keeps a pistol in the house. I'm not sure where. I don't think I want to know.

DETECTIVE

You're squeamish, too, huh?

PAMELA

You might say that.

DETECTIVE

It'll be in his desk, the second drawer down from his good hand. Why?

PAMELA

Why what.

DETECTIVE

Why does your husband keep a gun?

PAMELA

Protection...?

DETECTIVE

You look pretty protected to me. You got a ten-foot gate and alarms on every doorknob. Who could get in here? Has anybody ever?

PAMELA

Not really.

DETECTIVE

Your husband's a nervous type?

PAMELA

He likes to be cautious.

DETECTIVE

He ever pull it on you?

PAMELA

The gun? No.

DETECTIVE

Or you on him? Or on himself?

PAMELA

Of course not.

DETECTIVE

Okay.

PAMELA

My husband is the sanest and gentlest man in the world.

DETECTIVE

Sane and gentle but he owns a gun.

PAMELA

He's the kind of man people used to call pure of heart.

DETECTIVE

Big wheel in the church, isn't he?

PAMELA

You might say that.

DETECTIVE

She's always lying, you know.

PAMELA

Who.

DETECTIVE

The mysterious drop-dead blonde. But you, you're good. You're really good, aren't you.

PAMELA

I'm not lying. Why would I lie?

DETECTIVE

I'm saying, you're a good person. It's a rare addition to legs like that. Not to mention the rest of you.

PAMELA

Stop that, please.

DETECTIVE

Hey, I'm only 14. Like all men.

PAMELA

If you're squeamish, why did you become a detective?

DETECTIVE

A sorceress predicted it when I was born. I had no choice.

PAMELA

What did you want to be?

DETECTIVE

This. I wanted to be you. After growing up in an Akron all my own. I wanted Degas's on the wall and a Greenwich estate and a bottom so clean it don't mark up my chairs. Things did not work out that way. No surprise.

PAMELA

Were you two in a relationship? You and the woman in that case?

DETECTIVE

Why are you asking?

PAMELA

Just something I read.

DETECTIVE

Is that what interested you about that catastrophe?

PAMELA

No, I just...

DETECTIVE

What's the difference if I was? "In a relationship"?

PAMELA

Well, she died. That's a difference.

DETECTIVE

Can I make something clear? "Confidentially"? None of that case was planned. Nothing that happened was desired by the parties involved. Whatever you read in the papers, saw in the news, I took a job. As always, event, event, event, certain things came to pass. Some as a result, yes, of fucking a certain woman, pardon my French, some of them not. See, every case, it's like Schrodinger's

Cat. Right? You get handed a locked black box, you know there's a cat inside the box, question is, is the cat dead or alive. You start out, you think you know some things. You do not. You think you know who people are. You do not. You think you know what you're accomplishing. You got no idea. And while you're prying open the black box you hope, you really hope that cat is alive but you're often disappointed. In that particular case the cat was dead. I couldn't help it. I wish it had been different. It was not fun. Certainly not at the moment I had to kill the lying bitch you're asking about. But hey, everything good gets spoiled. That did too. If you're asking, do I regularly fuck women who are part of a case, the answer is I have done that from time to time and you're not my type but stand on line we'll see how you fare. Okay?

PAMELA

Yes. Yes, I'm sorry I asked.

DETECTIVE

So that case, that qualified me somehow for this "task" of yours? What is the task? What is all this? You want me to kill your husband?

PAMELA

No.

DETECTIVE

Some people don't know they want me to do that. I help 'em find it out. So what's my mission here?

PAMELA

You're sure you don't want a drink?

DETECTIVE

I've been drinking since dawn. Talk to me.

PAMELA

This is all going to sound crazy.

DETECTIVE

Sure, now I say, "Crazy, really, ma'am, how so?"

PAMELA

All right. Full confession. I've done something. I've done something very bad. Something terrible. What's this look?

DETECTIVE

No look. You've done something terrible. Okay. What's your terrible thing? You embezzled the Tuesday bridge money?

PAMELA

Nothing like that. No, this is something, I don't even know the word for it. Unforgivable. Irreparable. Unredeemable.

DETECTIVE

Is there a body I should know about?

PAMELA

There could be.

DETECTIVE

Come on! You did a terrible thing, what did you do?!

PAMELA

I don't know.

(A pause.)

DETECTIVE

You've done something bad. You don't know what it is.

PAMELA

Exactly.

DETECTIVE

And when would this have been?

PAMELA

I don't know that either.

DETECTIVE

As a guesstimate. Early childhood? Late last week?

PAMELA

I don't know. That's what I want you to find out.

DETECTIVE

To find out...?

PAMELA

What I did. And when and why and how I did it. What my crime is.

DETECTIVE

You were right the first time. You're crazy. I'll send you a bill.

(DETECTIVE starts out.)

PAMELA

No, listen.

DETECTIVE

You said "your crime." Is this a crime?

PAMELA

I don't know.

DETECTIVE

Or is it more on the order of you didn't floss before bed one night? Or you weren't nice to somebody at church on Sunday?

PAMELA

Is that what I seem to you? A nice, church-going woman?

DETECTIVE

Nice I don't know about yet. You go to church?

PAMELA

I do.

DETECTIVE

Do you believe in God?

PAMELA

I don't see what...

DETECTIVE

Do you believe in God?

PAMELA

Yes, I believe in God.

DETECTIVE

Which means, what, "cosmic energy"? "Universal love"?

PAMELA

It means I believe in God. The God, the only God.

DETECTIVE

So, heaven and hell?

PAMELA

Yes.

DETECTIVE

You go to confession a lot?

PAMELA

I'm not going to apologize for my beliefs.

DETECTIVE

I'm asking, are you prone to morbid self-examination. Is this thing a crime, or is it a sin?

PAMELA

I don't know. Both, I'd say.

DETECTIVE

You ever suffer from blackouts?

PAMELA
No.

DETECTIVE
Amnesia, anything like that?

PAMELA
No. Never.

DETECTIVE
You can't remember why you named your house Wishwood. Do you drink?

PAMELA
No.

DETECTIVE
Martinis at five?

PAMELA
I don't drink at all.

DETECTIVE
Drugs of any kind? Sleeping pills?

PAMELA
Nothing.

DETECTIVE
So basically you're a saint with memory issues.

PAMELA
I'm certainly not a saint. Not after what I've done.

DETECTIVE
Your terrible thing.

PAMELA
That's right.

DETECTIVE
Okay, so this thing would've been to a person, right? You didn't just crumple a fender in a parking lot.

PAMELA
No, I'm sure another person was involved. Someone got hurt or damaged because of what I did.

DETECTIVE
Did you do this inadvertently? Or with intent?

PAMELA
I have no idea.

DETECTIVE
Are you in therapy?

PAMELA
No.

DETECTIVE
Would you like to be? Don't tell me that's insulting.
Have you ever been away? The "rest cure"?

PAMELA
No. Never.

DETECTIVE
Are you sleeping with anybody?

PAMELA
My husband. Of course.

DETECTIVE
You don't have any kids.

PAMELA
No.

DETECTIVE
And?

PAMELA
We don't have children. That's not a crime.

DETECTIVE
You sleeping with anybody else?

PAMELA
No.

DETECTIVE
When's the last time you did?

PAMELA
Never.

DETECTIVE
You've never "strayed"? Not once, just off the road?

PAMELA
Never.

DETECTIVE
You swear?

PAMELA
Yes, I swear.

DETECTIVE
What about your father?

PAMELA
What about him?

DETECTIVE

You choked up talking about him. Maybe you two got it on and that's on your conscience.

PAMELA

Maybe I just loved him. And miss him. Maybe I was moved thinking about him. People do have such feelings. Not everything is dirty.

DETECTIVE

If I came on to you right now, what would you do?

PAMELA

Push you away.

DETECTIVE

Tell me to "behave"?

PAMELA

As I've done with men at parties a hundred times. My husband's associates are in and out of here all the time. Some of them "coming on to me." But I am not available the way everybody seems to be available to everybody else these days. I'm not interested in other men. Or in straying. Certainly not in "fucking."

DETECTIVE

Whoo. Now you are going to have to go to confession.

PAMELA

You think I'm a prig.

DETECTIVE

I don't know what you are. Not yet.

PAMELA

Look, I think this was a mistake, asking you in.

DETECTIVE

A mistake? No, no, no. Pamela, you know and I know that that is not possible.

PAMELA

Why.

DETECTIVE

Because - from out here? - I think you never made a mistake in your entire life.

PAMELA

I know I've made one.

DETECTIVE

Your big bad irretrievable mistake.

PAMELA

It's not just, it's not a mistake. Or some tiny offense. I've done something, I've caused something. I've damaged someone, hurt somebody. I know it sounds extreme but, to me, in my heart, when I think about it - which is all the time now - it feels like tragedy. All I keep thinking is guilty, guilty, guilty. But it keeps coming back to me and back to me and I can't get free of it. So I called you.

DETECTIVE

I think you want me to find out nothing's here.

PAMELA

You can't. The terrible thing's already happened. It's done.

DETECTIVE

Maybe it just feels that way.

PAMELA

How so...?

DETECTIVE

T.S. Eliot. Right? "Time past and time present are both contained in time future." You see? Maybe this thing is still out there, waiting for you to commit it. When you do, give me a call.

(DETECTIVE starts out.)

PAMELA

Look. Something is off. Don't you get a funny feeling sometimes, as a detective? Don't you get these little clues? A strange mark on a table? A pigeon feather floating in a closed room? That's what I keep feeling.

DETECTIVE

Sometimes it's just a pigeon feather.

PAMELA

All right, fine. Really. If you don't want to take this on, I'll find somebody who will and I know they're going to find something. And I'll take responsibility for it. I'd just like to know what it is so that I can atone for it or put it right or - something.

DETECTIVE

You know, I do have a funny feeling. It says your husband is shtupping his secretary.

PAMELA

No, he's not. I asked him.

DETECTIVE
You asked him, just like that?

PAMELA
We keep no secrets. I asked if there was someone else. He said no.

DETECTIVE
He could've been lying.

PAMELA
I'd know it if he were. He's a terrible liar.

DETECTIVE
He didn't ask you why you were asking?

PAMELA
He trusts me. And I trust him.

DETECTIVE
Pretty strong.

PAMELA
It makes us strong.

DETECTIVE
So, what, you tell each other your secrets, then rip each other apart?

PAMELA
I don't think we've ever had a fight. Not a serious one.

DETECTIVE
Wow. That's, like, supernatural.

PAMELA
It's just how we are. He likes to call us a "harmonious machine." You find that funny.

DETECTIVE
My machines tend to squeak a lot. Does Mr. Harmony know about your funny feeling?

PAMELA
No, you're the only person I've told.

DETECTIVE
So you do have secrets. Besides Virginia Slims behind the garage.

PAMELA
This is the first thing I've ever kept from him. The first serious thing.

DETECTIVE
Why this? Why not just tell him?

PAMELA

Because it might cause him pain.

DETECTIVE

Isn't pain what married people eat for breakfast? And lunch and dinner and dessert?

PAMELA

Have you ever been married?

DETECTIVE

No, I had marriage surgically removed some time ago. By an old girlfriend, actually. With a pair of hedge clippers.

PAMELA

Well, then, you can't understand me, can you. Or us. Or any of this. Can you?

DETECTIVE

You sure you want to find out the dirty deed you did? Ignorance is still bliss out there.

PAMELA

And still ignorance. I can't live like that.

DETECTIVE

Okay. Blank your mind, think about this thing you did, what comes to you?

PAMELA

I've tried that. It always just slithers away. It's like when you have déjà vu.

DETECTIVE

You get that? Déjà vu?

PAMELA

I've had it my whole life, off and on.

DETECTIVE

When I was a kid I got it all the time.

PAMELA

Then you know what it's like. Everything stops and you get locked into that one moment. And while you're in it you keep trying to call back when this moment happened before. And you have time to do that. It's like you're in this little eternity.

DETECTIVE

What I remember is how you feel really alive. When it happens.

PAMELA

Yes, you feel incandescent, don't you.

DETECTIVE

For that one second, bang, you really know you're here on planet earth.

PAMELA

Because it feels so meaningful. It's a moment so meaningful you got to re-live it.

DETECTIVE

Yeah.

(A pause.)

PAMELA

It's what I love about murder mysteries. Not the new violent ones. The older ones. Whodunnits. I don't care about the puzzle. Or who's the murderer. The solution is always banal. What I love is that, in a mystery, everything feels important. Right from page one you know the story's got this double layer. There's what's happening on the surface but all the while you can feel this darker level, underneath. You know somebody's lying. You know there's a gun, or a knife, or poison. You know somebody's going to die and certain things, small things, are clues to how and why that happens. Other things are red herrings but you can't tell the difference because all the way up to the banal and disappointing solution, everything, the tiniest little thing, feels important. A funny mark on a table. A pigeon feather in a closed room. They mean something. They're connected to a pattern. Whodunnits are a kind of poetry, really. That's what I love. Spending time in a world of intense...

DETECTIVE

Significance.

PAMELA

Significance. Where nothing is what it seems.

DETECTIVE

Like you, for example.

PAMELA

Oh, I'm exactly what I seem.

DETECTIVE

You say you're a criminal. At least we know who dunnit. We just don't know the "it."

PAMELA

You're not what you seem.

DETECTIVE

Who, me?

PAMELA

Well - Dante? T.S. Eliot?

DETECTIVE
Hey, you're not the only shmuck who still reads.

PAMELA
Do you believe in God?

DETECTIVE
The God, the only God? No.

PAMELA
I'm sorry.

DETECTIVE
If there was a God I still wouldn't believe in him. See, in the real world, it's not just Mrs. Peacock in the library. Everybody gets murdered somehow and it's never pretty. But like I say, everything good gets spoiled.

PAMELA
You really believe that?

DETECTIVE
My mantra. E.G.G.S. Everything Good Gets Spoiled.

PAMELA
You do seem to have known disappointment.

DETECTIVE
I live on it. Or for it. What do you live for?

PAMELA
Grace. Purity. Salvation. What's funny.

DETECTIVE
Purity's funny. Don't get me started on salvation.

PAMELA
The Buddha says if you're not working for your salvation every minute, you're painting a burning house.

DETECTIVE
Maybe we expiate our sins on the eternal wheel of recurrence.

(Miming a turning wheel with his finger:)
"Expiate - come back - expiate - come back..."

PAMELA
Horrible idea.

DETECTIVE
Hey. You're an asshole, you get to be an asshole all over again.

PAMELA
Horrible.

DETECTIVE

You do good, you get to hop off the wheel. Sounds like justice to me.

PAMELA

Yet you went to a religious school. Very religious.

DETECTIVE

So you looked me up, huh.

PAMELA

All that religion must've had some effect.

DETECTIVE

Yeah, it gave me this crazy idea suffering was good for me. Also a rotten feeling I'm being watched all the time. You heard of surveillance capitalism? I have surveillance atheism.

PAMELA

I like it that God is watching me. And over me.

DETECTIVE

In swim class, back at seminary school, we played this game called "Shark." One guy - and we're all naked, just to give you the whole picture - one guy who's the shark, he treads water in the deep end, the other guys line up down one side. The shark yells out "Shark!" and you gotta dive in and swim underwater all the way to the other side and line back up. Except: the shark, meanwhile, he dives down and tries to pull you up to the surface. He can choke you, he can smash you in the balls, everything's fair. If he does it, now you're both a shark treading water. You two yell "Shark!", everybody else dives back in and you try to drag 'em up. You keep this up, back and forth, back and forth, till everybody's a shark except the one last guy who made it across, now he's the shark and you start all over. You know what that game is? A bunch of scrawny naked souls trying to drown each other - or make it safe to the other side? That's the world. Your God gets off watching over that? Have fun, pal.

PAMELA

Will you help me? Please?

DETECTIVE

Yeah sure, I'll check for fingerprints right now.

PAMELA

Name your price. I'll pay it.

DETECTIVE

You know I'd have to talk to people, your friends and so on.

PAMELA

As long as you're discreet.

DETECTIVE

What do I say to your husband? "Oh, hi, I'm Pedro, the new assistant gardener, I got some questions about your wife"?

PAMELA

Try it.

DETECTIVE

Usually I'd start with you. "Where were you the night of X." But you don't know because you don't know what X was. So you got no alibi, but you might have a motive.

PAMELA

I might. I don't know.

DETECTIVE

Not yet you don't.

PAMELA

Isn't that what investigations are for? The cat in the box?

DETECTIVE

Yeah, yeah. The cat in the box...

PAMELA

You're still hesitating.

(DETECTIVE snatches something out of the air.)

DETECTIVE

Funny...

PAMELA

What is that?

DETECTIVE

(showing what's in his hand)

It's a pigeon feather.

(A pause. The HUSBAND ENTERS. English, let's say.)

HUSBAND

Darling, do you know where the dogs are? Oh, sorry. Am I disturbing?

PAMELA

Not at all. This is...um...

DETECTIVE

Hi there, Jack Skelton. I was in French at Catholic U. a different year from Pam.

HUSBAND

You call her Pam. That's funny.

DETECTIVE

Pam The Glam of Alpha Delta Pi. That's her.

HUSBAND

Well, welcome, Jack.

(Unnoticed by PAMELA or THE HUSBAND, THE DETECTIVE quietly pockets the gold-framed picture.)
There are drinks and things, I'm sure we can rustle up some coffee or tea. Just help yourself to anything.

DETECTIVE

Actually, I oughta be heading out...

HUSBAND

No, no, you two carry on. Don't let me interrupt.
Darling, I'm afraid I have to go to Zurich, leaving forthwith.

PAMELA

Do you want me to come along?

HUSBAND

There's no reason to, and it's only Zurich.

DETECTIVE

Good old "only Zurich."

HUSBAND

I'm sorry, "Skelton," you said? Et qu'est-ce que vous faites dans la vie, Monsieur Squelette?

DETECTIVE

Moi? En fait, je suis détective privé.

HUSBAND

Really. An actual private detective. Darling, isn't that wonderful?

DETECTIVE

Here's my card. In case you ever need my services.

HUSBAND

(looking at the card)
No name, just a telephone number. Very discreet.
Shouldn't you be meeting a drop-dead blonde at your office?

DETECTIVE

I came to Wishwood instead. It's not too shabby, by the way.

HUSBAND

Too shabby?

DETECTIVE

My office.

HUSBAND

Oh. Good...

DETECTIVE

So where does "Wishwood" come from?

HUSBAND

Wishwood. It's from T.S. Eliot. The first date we ever went on was to a rather obscure Eliot play. Wishwood was the name of the house.

DETECTIVE

Your Missus didn't know that.

HUSBAND

Really.

DETECTIVE

First date with "The Waste Land," maybe she repressed it.

HUSBAND

Now that's odd. Darling, where's your picture?

PAMELA

What...?

HUSBAND

Your picture.

PAMELA

Oh. I don't know. I don't know where that picture is.

HUSBAND

How bizarre. How absolutely bizarre.

PAMELA

Maybe the new cleaning person...

HUSBAND

You'll have to ask her. I adore that picture. Jack, you're a detective.

DETECTIVE

What is this thing?

HUSBAND

It's a miniature of Pamela in a small gold frame. You can see the mark on the table here where it sat.

DETECTIVE

Maybe somebody broke in and took it.

HUSBAND

Not likely. We're pretty well protected. And why would they take that, of all things?

DETECTIVE

I guess it's a mystery.

PAMELA

I'll look into it, sweetheart. We'll find it.

HUSBAND

We wouldn't want to lose it. That glorious picture.

PAMELA

We won't lose it.

HUSBAND

In any case, nice meeting you, Jack.

DETECTIVE

Yeah yeah, you go pack for Zurich.

HUSBAND

Yes, and find the dogs. See you anon, darling.

(Starts out; stops.)

Can I just ask - how did you become a detective, of all things?

DETECTIVE

A sorceress predicted it when I was born. I had no choice.

HUSBAND

Funny. Cheers, then!

(THE HUSBAND EXITS.)

DETECTIVE

"See you anon"? "Forthwith"?

PAMELA

Listen...

DETECTIVE

That's your husband and you don't drink? Where'd you find him? 1850?

PAMELA

Why did you tell him you're a detective?

DETECTIVE

What, you wanted me to lie? Here in the House Of No Secrets?

PAMELA

You lied about your name. "Jack Skelton"?

DETECTIVE

Force of habit.

PAMELA

It must be. You lied about having an office. I know you work from your home. Which judging by your address may well be pretty small and shabby.

DETECTIVE

So you did look into me.

PAMELA

As I said -

DETECTIVE

No, what I mean is, you didn't just pull my name out of the air and call me up last night.

PAMELA

May I have that picture back?

DETECTIVE

The thing is, I say "private detective," he doesn't say, "Really, darling, why do we have a detective in the house?" I say Catholic U., he doesn't say, "Really, darling, why would a fellow alum be in our bright fun parlor?" That's pure of heart, all right. I felt kinda sorry for the son-of-a-bitch.

PAMELA

The picture, please.

DETECTIVE

I'm amazed he noticed it's gone.

PAMELA

Why would you risk taking that?

DETECTIVE

Why did you risk this? You want the meeting confidential when your husband's around, liable to drop in?

PAMELA

I knew he'd be busy.

DETECTIVE

Maybe you wanted him to drop in on us.

PAMELA

Maybe I wanted him in the house for some protection.

DETECTIVE

Sure, sure. Can't have another man in the house without a chaperone.

PAMELA

Why would you take that picture?

DETECTIVE

You tell me.

PAMELA

I have no idea.

DETECTIVE

I'm gonna need it for the job, to show around to people. "Do you know this woman?" and so on.

PAMELA

You haven't accepted the job.

DETECTIVE

Okay. I wasn't gonna take on this crazy case, I wanted a souvenir. 'Cuz you're not going to give me a memento of our time together.

PAMELA

Our time together...

DETECTIVE

You know what happened here today. Right? I'm in, baby. I'm done. I'm head over testicles. You had me from Judy Collins. You had me from your voice on the phone. What the simple people used to call love.

PAMELA

If you don't give me the picture I'll call him back.

DETECTIVE

Great. Tell him why I'm here while you're at it. Tell him you did something terrible. Cause him some pain. I wonder what he would've done if I told him I took the picture. Maybe said, Go on, take it, help yourself. Must be pretty great for you, having a prize poodle. Do you put out a bowl for him with some kibble? Walk him twice a day and chain him up at night?

PAMELA

Why are you acting like this?

DETECTIVE

He's off to Zurich. You want to shack up? I'm available.

(PAMELA slaps him.)

Wow. Straight out of the movies. Are you for real? "Pamela Palmer"?

PAMELA

Nice words from you. A man of paper maché. I don't know what movie you're imitating or where you picked up this act. With your cheap cynicism and foul language. Doing mischief between me and my husband.

DETECTIVE

You called me in, remember?

PAMELA

And do you know why? You want to know what made me call you of all people? You broke my heart. You truly broke my heart in the news talking about that woman. I took you for an actual thinking and feeling person. That man there is a human being. The best man in the world, and yes, pure of heart. A gentleman. Doing more for humanity in one minute in "the money business" than you've done in your whole lifetime. Small wonder you thrive on disappointment. You are one. Now may I have the picture?

DETECTIVE

No.

PAMELA

Fine. Keep it, then. Just leave, please.

DETECTIVE

Good riddance. Because, you know, I am getting a "funny feeling" here. I'm getting a very bad feeling. 'Cuz I think you are powder blue and pearls on the outside but something way, way different on the in. I don't know what, maybe carbon steel, maybe coal tar, I don't want to know. Or what petty transgression you may have made. This crazy fantasy you did something bad. This bullshit high-class masochism. Maybe it makes you feel interesting and important. Maybe it makes you think you actually done something in your life. So look, I'd be happy to take your money but I'm not gonna waste my time looking for nothing, just to give your empty days here some significance. Neither one of you's living in this century. You people oughta powder your hair. You're useless. You're antiques. And you know the barbarians are coming and they're gonna take everything you got and show you to the guillotine. Sorry I tracked mud onto your tapestries, Princess. But I will not be your pigeon. Or your poodle. No thank you.

PAMELA

I'll send you a check for your time. You know the way out.

(DETECTIVE EXITS. PAMELA REMAINS. LIGHTS CHANGE.)

SCENE TWO.

(Early summer. Early afternoon. THE MOTHER ENTERS with a suitcase and a carry-on bag.)

MOTHER
So nothin's changed here, huh.

PAMELA
I'm sorry?

MOTHER
Nothin's changed.

PAMELA
You mean the house? No, I think everything's pretty much the same.

MOTHER
I see you still got all the satin.

PAMELA
You never did like the satin.

MOTHER
I dunno how you keep dogs and satin at the same time. All that filth. Are they here someplace, the dogs?

PAMELA
No, they're outside.

MOTHER
I'll say this, you keep it all spotless.

PAMELA
It's not as immaculate as your house.

MOTHER
Yeah, well. Chintz is easy. You throw it in the washer.

PAMELA
Do you want anything, a sandwich, or...?

MOTHER
No, I had my sandwich on the plane. My special chicken salad with the cranberries on my good sourdough?
(The carry-on bag:)
I brung you a coupla loaves.

PAMELA
(has been through this before)
Mom, you don't have to bring a sandwich for First Class.

MOTHER
Theirs is never as good. And I seen the arm and a leg you paid for that ticket. From Akron? They oughta be ashamed.

PAMELA

Do you want to sit down? Or we could go outside and talk.
The garden's at its peak right now.

MOTHER

You know, the doctor says they got it all. The operation.
In case you were wondering.

PAMELA

That's fantastic, Mom. That's great news.

MOTHER

Yeah, he says to me after, he says, You musta been in
terrible pain. I says to him, Of course there was pain,
it's cancer. These doctors, they want you to be a victim
so they can save you. Then they charge you an arm and a
leg just because they saved your life.

PAMELA

(embracing her)
Oh, Mom. That's great.

MOTHER

Have you been smokin' again?

PAMELA

I do sneak one, once in a while...

MOTHER

It'll stain your teeth. Remember that girl on Burnham,
with the purple teeth? And then they all fell out?

PAMELA

Mom, did Daddy use to say we were going to live in
France?

MOTHER

In what?

PAMELA

In France.

MOTHER

Oh, your father. Your father was in Cuckooland 24 hours a
day... Did I tell you they asked me to embroider the
cushion the bishop sits on, Christmas Eve?

PAMELA

Congratulations.

MOTHER

Only what can you put on a pillow a bishop can sit on,
huh? It can't be the Baby Jesus. Which would be
sacrilege. Or a saint. The bishop we got, the size of his
behind, it'd have to be the whole Last Supper. You're
still going to church on Sundays, you two? That's good.

PAMELA

Mom, I've fallen in love.

MOTHER

Yeah, I thought it was gonna be somethin' like that.

PAMELA

How so...?

MOTHER

When you called. Hi, Ma, you wanna come out for a little visit? Pamela, I carried you, I raised you, I know you. You're me.

PAMELA

Well, I've fallen in love.

MOTHER

No, you haven't.

PAMELA

Yes, Mom, I have.

MOTHER

No, you have not "fallen in love." Not unless it's with your husband.

PAMELA

It's not my husband.

MOTHER

This is a man you're talking about?

PAMELA

Yes, it's a man.

MOTHER

Have you had relations with this man?

PAMELA

No. Nothing. Nothing's happened.

MOTHER

Well, then. It's not too late.

PAMELA

I think it is too late. I am painting a burning house.

MOTHER

Painting a burning house. I think you are losing your mind, young lady.

PAMELA

Maybe I am.

MOTHER

No, you are not.

PAMELA

It feels like it. I'm so - distracted all the time.
Mooning around and sighing.

MOTHER

Oh my Lord...

PAMELA

I can't stop thinking about him.

MOTHER

Is this high school, Pamela? Is this that thing, all over again, is that where we are?

PAMELA

No.

MOTHER

You are standin on a cliff is what you are, starin'
straight down into nothin'. You still love your husband?

PAMELA

Yes.

MOTHER

Are you having relations with him?

PAMELA

Yes. Occasionally.

MOTHER

Occasionally will do. Fine. You done nothin' with this man, keep doin' that. This is a phase. And it will pass.

PAMELA

I don't think so. He has me in his thrall.

MOTHER

Pamela, you are not 16 years old no more!

PAMELA

God damn it, Mom, I'm asking for your help!

MOTHER

Don't you take that tone with me.

PAMELA

I'm sorry.

MOTHER

And where did you get that language?

PAMELA

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

MOTHER

Well, you are your father's daughter, all right. This is cuckoo talk and I wish you could hear yourself. You got this from him, y'know, you sure did not get it from me. Making a scene outta yourself. So what has happened? Between you and this man?

PAMELA

Nothing. I've only ever seen him once.

MOTHER

Wait, wait. You seen him once?

PAMELA

That's all. We met and we talked. In this very room. And I fell in love.

MOTHER

Once is not love.

PAMELA

It was enough. He has this, I don't know, this power over me.

MOTHER

Did he force himself on you?

PAMELA

Oh, he tried to, sort of. I put him off.

MOTHER

Good-lookin', probably. Rough cut? Like your father?

PAMELA

The thing is, he's not even a very nice person.

MOTHER

Did you go looking for this? For this man's attentions?

PAMELA

I told you. We talked once.

MOTHER

I'm asking, did you go lookin' for this?

PAMELA

No. Not exactly. I don't know. Actually, he broke my heart before I ever met him. In the news.

MOTHER

What is he, this man?

PAMELA

He's a private detective.

MOTHER

Oh, Jesus. Okay. You think you're in love? Fine. You got only one question. What do what you want. Do you want all this, here? Or do you want this other man and his life, a detective life? In the news?

PAMELA

You know, he's innocent, really.

MOTHER

Who is ever innocent in the news? And I will ask you again. What do you want?

PAMELA

I don't know what I want.

MOTHER

Well you're gonna know it when you get it. Because, sweetheart - in the end? - what you get is what you want.

PAMELA

Did you get what you wanted?

MOTHER

I must've. It's what I got.

PAMELA

What do I do, Ma?

MOTHER

First thing is, you gotta get this man outta your life.

PAMELA

He's not in my life.

MOTHER

Maybe you move away. You and your legally married husband. You go live someplace else.

PAMELA

We can't just up and leave.

MOTHER

He's got money. You two can live anyplace you want.

PAMELA

So I say, "we're moving"? Just like that?

MOTHER

That man will go the ends of the earth for you. Just tell him what you want, he'll do it! You know you always get your way with him.

PAMELA

I can't do that to him.

MOTHER

Have you forgotten your mission? What you're on earth for? Peace at home. Peace of mind. Peace with God. Now you go to church and pray for strength, young lady. Otherwise, I'm sorry. You made your bed, you sleep in it.

PAMELA

It would be nice to sleep.

MOTHER

I'm gonna pray for you. What do you say?

PAMELA

Thank you, Mama.

MOTHER

You know, all this was bound to happen.

PAMELA

Why...?

MOTHER

Why, because you're Pamela Palmer, that's why. Now I don't want another word about this. Ever. I'm gonna go wash up.

PAMELA

(the suitcase)
I'll take that.

MOTHER

I know the way. I know the way.
(MOTHER starts out with the suitcase.)
"In love." God help you, sweetheart. God help you.

(MOTHER EXITS, PAMELA following. LIGHTS CHANGE.)

SCENE THREE.

(Late summer. Late afternoon. THE DETECTIVE and THE HUSBAND.)

HUSBAND

Thank you so much for coming. Would this be all right, in here?

DETECTIVE

Looks good enough. Why not.

HUSBAND

I like this room. It's so nice and bright.

DETECTIVE

Yeah, and having the garden right there is so fun.

HUSBAND

It is, isn't it. Though it's mostly past now. Summer's almost gone again. And when did that happen?

DETECTIVE

So how was Zurich?

HUSBAND

Zurich... Oh, the usual nonsense. Money and so on.

DETECTIVE

Yeah, it's always a bother.

HUSBAND

Do you know I once knew a man who fertilized his roses with human blood?

DETECTIVE

Human blood...

HUSBAND

No, really. Very nice man. He ran a local blood bank. You know blood goes bad after 21 days.

DETECTIVE

I did not know that.

HUSBAND

Or it used to. Anyway he'd toss a few of the expired plasma packets into his trunk and take them home. Quietly spread them on his flower beds in the middle of the night. And voila, prize-winning roses year after year! Of course his garden stank to high heaven in mid-summer. All that heated plasma.

DETECTIVE

Hot plasma. Sure.

HUSBAND

But that's the secret, he said to me, if you want good roses. Corncob mulch - and blood.

DETECTIVE

(indicating the garden)

You don't...?

HUSBAND

What, here? Blood? No, no, no. I mean - I would doubt it...

DETECTIVE

So the Missus isn't home?

HUSBAND

Pamela is off doing some charity work this afternoon. I think we should have sufficient time. Can I offer you something? A drink?

DETECTIVE

I'm on sabbatical from the D.T.'s right now.

HUSBAND

Ah-ha. Coffee or tea?

DETECTIVE

You know I charge extra for house calls to Greenwich.

HUSBAND

I will pay you for this visit, regardless.

DETECTIVE

Good. I'll take the Degas ballerina, the one on the left.

HUSBAND

I'm sorry. That one you can't have.

DETECTIVE

Funny.

HUSBAND

What.

DETECTIVE

I'm having déjà vu. You ever get that?

HUSBAND

Not to my knowledge. Do you have a Missus, as you say? Or a Mister?

DETECTIVE

No, and no. I'm a solo act.

HUSBAND

I recommend it. Marriage, I mean.

DETECTIVE

Yeah, well, when you got a wife like yours.

HUSBAND

I am very blest, aren't I. Pamela's a model woman, model human being. She's also something that's gone out of fashion. She's affectionate. What woman is tenderhearted anymore? And uncorrupted? Though what do I know. You would know. What are women like these days?

DETECTIVE

Not like Pamela Palmer.

HUSBAND

Not like Pamela Palmer. As I say.

DETECTIVE

You were about to tell me why I'm here.

HUSBAND

Yes, yes, yes. Why are you here...

DETECTIVE

Let me guess. This is an unusual case.

HUSBAND

It is unusual. Though I wouldn't call it a case, exactly.

DETECTIVE

Maybe more of an investigation? Or a "task"?

HUSBAND

A task. Yes, that would be spot-on.

DETECTIVE

Maybe you've done something terrible? You want me to look into it?

HUSBAND

No, this is not about me. It's about Pamela...

DETECTIVE

The meter is running.

HUSBAND

This will probably sound a bit crazy.

DETECTIVE

Crazy, really, how so?

HUSBAND

Well, to quote the cliché, she's been acting strangely of late. She's not herself somehow.

DETECTIVE

"Not herself," meaning...?

HUSBAND

You know Pamela. How she is. Effervescent. Outgoing. Funny.

DETECTIVE

Yeah, that's Pam all right.

HUSBAND

Until recently she was doing Laughing Yoga twice a week!

DETECTIVE

"Laughing Yoga"...

HUSBAND

Where you alternately twist yourself into contortions and laugh?

DETECTIVE

Sounds like life. I'd love to see her doing it.

HUSBAND

These days she's, I don't know, distracted. I would say - giddy. Flighty. Sort of mooning about. Staring off into space. And sighing a lot. I've caught her at that. And going off on bizarre tangents. She asked me recently if we're antiques, the two of us. I couldn't follow her train of thought. Something about guillotines, and powdering our hair. The main thing is that... It's as if... I'd almost say she was acting guilty. She's always skulking off alone someplace.

DETECTIVE

Maybe she's sneaking a smoke out back.

HUSBAND

I think she has been, actually. But this is more than cigarettes. Something's got hold of her.

DETECTIVE

You got any idea why the change?

HUSBAND

Not a clue. It could be something tiny. Pamela being rather scrupulous by nature.

DETECTIVE

Maybe she bent somebody's fender in a parking lot.

HUSBAND

She would've left her number on the windshield. Plus all the money in her purse.

DETECTIVE

When did it start, this change?

HUSBAND

I'd say around that time you came to visit. So spring, sometime. And quite a godsend you were.

DETECTIVE

Sorry?

HUSBAND

Giving me your card.

DETECTIVE

I have the gift of prophecy. Can I just ask, is everything jake in the bedroom?

HUSBAND

Oh, yes, perfect. No issues there.

DETECTIVE

Do you think she might be straying? Another man?

HUSBAND

Pamela? Straying?

DETECTIVE

Or woman?

HUSBAND

Oh, no. No, no, no. Neither one. Not possible.

DETECTIVE

You said she's "affectionate." Tenderhearted.

HUSBAND

Affectionate's not adulterous. If Pamela were having an affair, she'd tell me. We have no secrets.

DETECTIVE

Have you ever? Strayed?

HUSBAND

Why would I stray married to Pamela? Anyway she'd know it right off. I'm a terrible liar.

DETECTIVE

You got no secrets, why not just ask her what's going on?

HUSBAND

I've asked myself that. I think I'm afraid to find out. I also think it might throw us out of alignment somehow. We're also, you may have noticed, a bit old-fashioned.

DETECTIVE

There is a lotta etiquette around here.

HUSBAND

If we're antiques we're willing ones. Ruined by tradition. And the church, probably. In a happy way.

DETECTIVE

Ruined with a beautiful house. Beautiful wife. God is good.

HUSBAND

I'd be presumptuous to take all this as some kind of divine reward. I haven't deserved it anyway. It does warp you, though, you know. Beauty does. Happiness. I think I was ruined by beauty as a child. I'm serious. The way some children are destroyed by trauma, or poverty, or abuse. I was ruined by too much beauty too early on. My father was in the diplomatic corps so we lived all over the world. Extraordinary places. You know what my earliest memory is? This may have done me in forever. The earliest thing I can remember is standing in a field in Darjeeling on a summer day. So I must've been three at the most. The grass is high, as I remember it, practically up to my waist, golden-green and very soft, and there are these massive sunflowers, way up there out of my reach. And the field is full of bees. Wonderful bees, thick fat heavy bumblebees. The whole field, the earth sounds like it's buzzing. As if you could hear the vibration of all the particles making up the universe. A ways off, there's a villa with a garden where my mother's

talking to someone. Beyond them are the Himalayas, and snowcaps. Over it all a sky of pure Cézanne blue.

DETECTIVE

Nice.

HUSBAND

I'm not lost in this field or anything. I'm just walking around out there in all this tall grass. Very happy. Then my mother calls my name, and that's where the memory ends. For my mother it was probably just another day, she'd stopped to call on someone. For me, that field is where I begin. That's where I suddenly show up in the world, walking around in that buzzing field full of sunflowers with my mother calling my name. Everything was poised to happen. The whole rest of my life. I've always thought it made some kind of difference, having that for the first thing I remember - the grass and the bees and the sunflowers. The mountains and sky. My mother. In a way, it's like I never left that field. In a way, it's like I can't.

DETECTIVE

It sure would've ruined me.

HUSBAND

The same way I can't stop reading Yeats or listening to Ravel. If I don't, who will?

DETECTIVE

You two are a matching pair of bookends, aren't you.

HUSBAND

Yes, wonderful, isn't it. Although. This is odd.

DETECTIVE

Try me.

HUSBAND

You mentioned straying. A friend of ours told me a man has been asking about Pamela.

DETECTIVE

Really.

HUSBAND

Yes. There's our friend at the bar in the St. Regis and a man sits down beside her. An attractive man. And he falls into conversation with her.

DETECTIVE

And he asks about your wife?

HUSBAND

Yes. Subtly, though. Almost as if he'd sat down there to do just that.

DETECTIVE

To ask questions.

HUSBAND

Strange questions. Probing things about Pamela's past. Anyway, it spooked our friend and she called me straight away.

DETECTIVE

What do you think that was all about? That guy?

HUSBAND

You're a detective. You tell me.

DETECTIVE

They say the truth is usually staring you in the face.

HUSBAND

Sorry? Oh, yes. So - I must know the truth, I just don't see it yet.

DETECTIVE

I'll tell you this, if your wife was straying, her guy wouldn't go around bothering her friends in public bars.

HUSBAND

You see? I told you it was impossible.

DETECTIVE

Did you mention this to her, about the St. Regis?

HUSBAND

No, I didn't, actually.

DETECTIVE

So you do have secrets.

HUSBAND

I didn't feel good about it. Skulking around myself. That was when I called you. The thing is, I wouldn't want to cause her any pain. She might get frightened, wondering why somebody would be out there asking about her. I do like to try to protect her from such things. Scary things. Sad things.

DETECTIVE

Sure, sure. You don't want to freak her out.

HUSBAND

She seems in some kind of pain already. And that's what I want you to find out.

DETECTIVE

Find out...?

HUSBAND

What's eating away at her. This guilt or whatever it is. Probably some harmless peccadillo. Pamela being rather...

DETECTIVE

Scrupulous.

HUSBAND

Scrupulous. Yes.

DETECTIVE

Maybe you ought to call in a priest. Or a shrink.

HUSBAND

But you're an old chum, and a detective. You ask questions for a living.

DETECTIVE

Not this kind.

HUSBAND

Why were you here?

DETECTIVE

Sorry?

HUSBAND

What were you doing here, that day, with her? Of course you went to the same college.

DETECTIVE

No, I didn't.

HUSBAND

I'm sorry?

DETECTIVE

That was a lie. About college.

HUSBAND

Really.

DETECTIVE

I never saw her till that day. She called me in about something and you walked in on us.

HUSBAND

Why would you lie about college?

DETECTIVE

It's a professional habit I'm trying to break.

HUSBAND

I can't believe that I was taken in. Well, yes I can.

DETECTIVE

Aren't you going to ask what she called me in for?

HUSBAND

I'm sure if it had anything to do with me she would have told me.

DETECTIVE

Stop it, will you?

HUSBAND

What...

DETECTIVE

Getting walked over. Walking all over yourself. Of course it has to do with you! You two are your own separate solar system. Whatever happens with her, you're part of it, you're implicated. Automatically. Gravitationally.

HUSBAND

So - what did she call you in about?

DETECTIVE

She thinks she's done something terrible.

HUSBAND

What. What has she done?

DETECTIVE

That's the cat in the box. She doesn't know.

HUSBAND

Wait a moment... You're the man in the St. Regis! The attractive man. How in the world did I not see that?

DETECTIVE

Good people don't. It keeps them good.

HUSBAND

Anyway, Jack, I would pay you generously to look into this.

DETECTIVE

You don't need me. The case is solved. You know why she's been skulking around.

HUSBAND

But not the source of it. Not what's eating away at her. Listen. I have to go to Brussels for a week. What if you moved in here. We'll say there've been break-ins in the area, burglaries, which is true actually, and I want to hire you to guard the house, keep watch while I'm away. You can use the time together to investigate.

DETECTIVE

Sorry. Thank you but no thank you. I'm flattered you asked me in. It's an interesting task. But I'm not the man for it.

HUSBAND

I'm sorry.

DETECTIVE

You want my advice? Ask her. Sit her down and say, what is all this? What's bothering you, honey? Poof, it'll be gone.

(PAMELA ENTERS.)

PAMELA

Sweetheart, whose car is that in the...?

(SHE stops as she sees the DETECTIVE.)

DETECTIVE

How are you, Pam?

PAMELA

What is this?

HUSBAND

You're very early.

PAMELA

Yes, we ended early...

HUSBAND

How's life at the shelter, how's Bridgeport?

PAMELA

What is all this?

HUSBAND

I asked Jack over to discuss a small job.

PAMELA

Really. Business job, or...?

HUSBAND

It's rather hard to explain, actually...

DETECTIVE

Look, hey, why don't you leave us for a sec. You go pack and I'll explain.

HUSBAND

Yes. Good, very good. Thank you, Jack.

PAMELA

Do you need any help up there?

HUSBAND

No, no, no, I can manage. Everything's in hand.

PAMELA

Sweetheart, where are the dogs?

HUSBAND

Outside, I think, last I saw them. Cheers, then. Carry on.

(THE HUSBAND EXITS.)

PAMELA

You again. I can't believe it. At Wishwood.

DETECTIVE

Like he says, it's complicated. You're not gonna punch me out, are you?

PAMELA

I don't know. Should I?

DETECTIVE

How have you been, how are you?

PAMELA

I'm good, I'm very good.

DETECTIVE

So you were off ladling hot soup to the homeless?

PAMELA

Something like that.

DETECTIVE

In a string of pearls?

PAMELA

How else would they recognize me? How would I recognize myself?

DETECTIVE

It's good to see you again.

PAMELA

And you, too. Feels like a lifetime ago now, doesn't it. Or like yesterday.

DETECTIVE

Feels like a minute to me. Except you look, I don't know...

PAMELA

Like a lying drop-dead blonde?

DETECTIVE

You look different. The same old thousand watts. Maybe even bumped up a thousand. But - I don't know - changed. Is it the hair?

PAMELA

Maybe it's you. Your surprise visit.

DETECTIVE

Yeah, right. I'm sure.

PAMELA

You look good. You seem very good.

DETECTIVE

It's the usual front. Minus all the alcohol. I've been on the wagon since I seen you. Amazing the difference. Did you know sidewalks and lampposts are actually straight?

PAMELA

So you came back.

DETECTIVE

Hey. It wasn't my idea. He called me in. Plus it seemed like a good opportunity to bring you back your picture.
(HE takes out the GOLD-FRAMED PICTURE.)
I don't know what you tell him, how it got out of this room.

PAMELA

I'll tell him you took it.

DETECTIVE

You'd have to explain why I might've wanted it. Do you still think you did something terrible?

PAMELA

No, that's all passed. I'm over it.

DETECTIVE

Any idea what that was all about?

PAMELA

Some phase. Some residual something. Maybe too much French classical drama. All those tortured women. I have to believe it was all for the good. To shake me up a little. Anyway, it's gone. Really. I'm good, I'm fine. Sort of exhilarated, really. The burden is off.

DETECTIVE

So, go in peace and sin no more, huh.

PAMELA

Exactly.

DETECTIVE

(setting the PICTURE back on the table)
Anyway, there you are, safe and sound.

PAMELA

So - he called you in about something...?

DETECTIVE

Yeah. It seems you're not your usual effervescent affectionate carefree self these days. He says you're acting guilty.

PAMELA

You didn't explain about our meeting, the reason I...?

DETECTIVE

Yeah, I did, actually.

PAMELA

Oh, no. You told him?

DETECTIVE

I cut to the proverbial chase.

PAMELA

So now I have go back over all that with him? Back into guilt?

DETECTIVE

Not totally. See, I've been on the job since last we met.

PAMELA

On the job...?

DETECTIVE

Asking around. Discreetly bumping into people you know.

PAMELA

You're joking. Who have you talked to?

DETECTIVE

Easy, easy. It's all cool. You know what I dug out? Nothing. Nobody has any hard feelings all the way back to Akron. Nobody feels damaged or hurt, you have done nothing reprehensible. Everybody loves Pamela. You oughta hear the adjectives people throw around. "Smart." "Funny." "Kind and generous." I got that a lot. "Sensual." That was one of your women friends. "Crazy sexy." That's from a couple of gay men who will remain anonymous. Steve and Bruce. Anyway I'd like to meet that Pamela Palmer sometime. The funny witty one.

(PAMELA laughs.)

Did you learn that laugh at Laughing Yoga?

PAMELA

You really have no idea who I am. We met at a bad moment and you got completely the wrong idea about me.

DETECTIVE

So why're you acting so funny these days? Or did he mistake all your exhilaration for guilt?

PAMELA

It's probably his imagination. The way all that was mine. I do appreciate all your detecting. As they say, the undetected life...

DETECTIVE

...is not worth living. Cute. Thanks for the generous check, by the way.

(Takes out a CHECK and lays it down.)

It's on the house.

PAMELA

Oh, no, keep that. Please.

DETECTIVE

Nope. Call it my just deserts for being an asshole. Anyway we're done. You know everything. He knows everything. Nobody knows anything. The banal solution to The Wishwood Case. So like I say: nice seeing you again.

(DETECTIVE starts to leave.)

PAMELA

Look. Look, I'm sorry it all went so bad the last time you were here. I got angry. It was all sort of high school, wasn't it.

DETECTIVE

High school at warp speed. First date to break-up all in one shot.

PAMELA

Everything Good Gets Spoiled.

DETECTIVE

You remember my mantra.

PAMELA

I remember everything.

(A pause.)

Do you believe in God yet? Any god? Besides T.S. Eliot?

DETECTIVE

Funny you ask. I walked into a church the other day.

PAMELA

Really. Did you kneel down? Did you pray?

DETECTIVE

No, I thought about you.

PAMELA

Oh. Thank you.

DETECTIVE

I checked out their hours for confession. Took a couple of laps around their new-age labyrinth. Listen. Sorry I was kinda rough, the last time.

PAMELA

A lot of what you said hit home. Deeply home. You told me I was lying and I was. In French classical fashion, I was lying to myself. You said I'd never made a mistake. I realized I've made a major one. I've let myself turn into this. Into Wishwood.

DETECTIVE

If you weren't Wishwood, what would you wish to be?

PAMELA

You.

DETECTIVE

Seriously.

PAMELA

I mean it. I...admire you. You remind me why we're in the world.

DETECTIVE

Which is why, again?

PAMELA

To do some good for people. To help the world.

DETECTIVE

I think I once did something good. I can't remember what it was now...

PAMELA

Ha, ha.

DETECTIVE

I keep thinking about it over and over, I feel so guilty...

PAMELA

Ha, ha.

DETECTIVE

The difference between you and me is, I know what I did and I keep trying to forget it.

PAMELA

But you're a good person.

DETECTIVE

How do you figure that?

PAMELA

Because you know you're not.

DETECTIVE

That good old Vatican logic. I know it well.

PAMELA

At least you've done something with your life. You said I was useless that day and it's true. You said I wasn't living in this century. You were right. But satin looks good when the present is horrid and the future looks like Red China. I hate the world I'm in. I hate the century we're in. I hate the country I'm in. The noise and the filth. The ignorance. The violence. The endless pornography. I hate the garbage that passes for art and I hate it that love and romance are now relics. I hate that young people sitting together don't talk to each other, they stare into a screen and talk to other people. As if you, the person in the room with me, weren't the most important thing in the world... Luckily, the human race is exterminating itself in five hundred different ways. It can't happen soon enough, as far as I'm concerned.

DETECTIVE

You don't sound like "you're good, you're fine, you're exhilarated."

PAMELA

Well. If night never came I'd be a lot happier. I have been having some bad nights. Thanks to you.

DETECTIVE

Me?

PAMELA

And other things. Crazy things. There was the night I realized, really realized, that we have no names. No more than a dog has a name although we give him one. No more than that table or this couch has a name. "Pamela Palmer" is nothing but a printed tag around my neck. We get fooled into thinking we're more than just anonymous animals. Homeless nameless bodies.

DETECTIVE

I think it's time for that rest cure.

PAMELA

You're my rest cure. I feel better already.

DETECTIVE

I dunno, I like the world. Sure, it's loud and it's dirty and nobody listens to Cole Porter anymore. But it's still got surprises. Things that disappoint my expectation of disappointment. People like you.

PAMELA

Me.

DETECTIVE

People who're responsible, who maybe feel guilty for doing something bad when it's not them that's rotten. You didn't do anything bad. The world did. It brought you wars and disease and famine and put beggars in the streets for you to feel guilty about. Maybe you didn't toss enough in somebody's cup one day, and that's why you felt guilty.

PAMELA

Have you really thought about me?

DETECTIVE

Yeah, sure.

PAMELA

In church?

DETECTIVE

And elsewhere.

PAMELA

Do you still think about me "in that way"?

DETECTIVE

What way is that?

PAMELA

That way. I think God meant us to meet.

DETECTIVE

God. Wow. That's big.

PAMELA

God meant me to notice you and call you in the middle of the night so you could shake me up. And save me. Or we could save each other. That morning we had together, you said it was love.

DETECTIVE

I was probably drunk.

PAMELA

Could you love me? "In that way"? Because I would love you back.

DETECTIVE

Wait, wait, wait.

PAMELA

My husband's going to Brussels. If we "shacked up," as you say, would it be more than... No. You know what, it doesn't matter. What if we did. You and I. What if we just did it.

DETECTIVE

Shacked up.

PAMELA

Yes.

DETECTIVE

While he's gone.

PAMELA

Yes.

DETECTIVE

Had sex.

PAMELA

Yes, had sex.

DETECTIVE

Man. You are just piling shit up, aren't you.

PAMELA

Take me. Use me. I don't care.

(PAMELA tries to kiss him.)

DETECTIVE

Whoa, whoa, whoa.

PAMELA

I'm sorry. Did I misunderstand?

DETECTIVE

No. No. Not at all. If you tried that last time I was here? Sure. This visit? I'm very flattered, but no. I might be 14 years old but I'm smart enough to know I'm not the boy for you.

PAMELA

I think you are the boy for me.

DETECTIVE

You need to get laid, you should talk to your sidekick.

PAMELA

This isn't about getting laid. This is about you. And love.

DETECTIVE

It's not love.

PAMELA

Yes, yes, it is love.

DETECTIVE

You want to love somebody, love him. Love a gentleman. Not a jerk. I'm sorry. I mean it. I'm sorry.

PAMELA

All right. Well. There's your mantra again. Everything good gets spoiled.

DETECTIVE

Maybe the moral is: don't fuck things up, they'll do that on their own.

(THE HUSBAND ENTERS.)

HUSBAND

How's everything in here?

DETECTIVE

Good. Good. I was just leaving. Nice seeing you two again. Take care of yourselves. And farewell, Wishwood!

(THE DETECTIVE EXITS. EVENING starts to fall.)

HUSBAND

Funny man.

PAMELA

Mmmmmmm. Mmmm-hmmmm...

HUSBAND

So did you and Jack have a good talk?

PAMELA
Jack and I... Yes, very good.

HUSBAND
I really like Jack.

PAMELA
Yes, so do I.

HUSBAND
He and I had a good talk as well. Darling, listen. I'm sorry you've been so troubled.

PAMELA
I'm not troubled. Really.

(PAMELA notices the CHECK lying in full view.)

HUSBAND
No, tell me. What is all this, darling? What's been bothering you?

PAMELA
Nothing's bothering me. It was all just...I don't know ...a phase. Some residual something. Nothing to worry about.

HUSBAND
Well, good. Good.
(PAMELA quietly sneaks the CHECK out of view.)
I see you found it.

PAMELA
Sorry?

HUSBAND
The picture. Where was it?

PAMELA
Oh. That picture. I don't know. Nowhere special. Just.

HUSBAND
You're sure you're all right?

PAMELA
Yes, I'm good, I'm very good, stop worrying about me. Please.

HUSBAND
I love you.

PAMELA
And I love you. Of course.

HUSBAND

Well, then. Since I love you and you love me, I'm going to go to Brussels. All right? Good. Good good good.

(THE HUSBAND starts out.)

PAMELA

Sweetheart.

HUSBAND

Mmm?

PAMELA

What would you think about moving?

HUSBAND

I'm sorry?

PAMELA

What would you think about moving. What if we moved.

HUSBAND

Moved. You mean - moved house? Moved where?

PAMELA

I don't know. Anywhere. Paris. Tuscany. Kyoto.

HUSBAND

Kyoto... Kyoto, Japan?

PAMELA

It's not as if we need to be here. We could live anywhere.

HUSBAND

Well. I suppose. Yes. I suppose we could move...

PAMELA

Could we really? I'd love that so much. When you come back from Brussels let's pull out a map some night and pick a place. Someplace we love. Or someplace new. Anyplace.

HUSBAND

Wait wait wait. Why in the world would we want to move?

PAMELA

For a change. To see the world.

HUSBAND

We've both seen much of it. I as a child...

PAMELA

Yes, I know, but...

HUSBAND

Is anyplace better than here? Our little corner of paradise?

PAMELA

A corner named after T.S. Eliot.

HUSBAND

If that's all it is, we'll change the name! What name do you want?

PAMELA

No, that's not all it is. That's not all it is. That's not all it is.

HUSBAND

Talk to me. Tell me. What is it?

PAMELA

Would you say I'm an attractive woman?

HUSBAND

Of course you are. You're wildly attractive. You know that.

PAMELA

Do you know what happens to attractive women in this world?

HUSBAND

They marry lucky men like me?

PAMELA

They attract other men.

HUSBAND

Oh. Why? Is there a man who's been bothering you?

PAMELA

You might say that. No. No, that's not what I meant to say. Forget all that.

HUSBAND

Is there a man? Who's bothering you?

PAMELA

Yes. Or - I'm bothered by him. You might say.

HUSBAND

A man. Well.

PAMELA

I'm sorry. It's not at all what you think.

HUSBAND

But are you - I'm sorry - are you involved with this man? Somehow? Has something happened between you and, and him? What's happened?

PAMELA

Nothing's happened.

HUSBAND

You mean, nothing physical.

PAMELA

Nothing period. Nothing.

HUSBAND

But is this serious? I'm sorry, I still don't understand.

PAMELA

There's a man but nothing has happened.

HUSBAND

Something must have happened or be happening if you want to move to Japan, or whatever. It must be serious.

PAMELA

It's not serious. Whatever it is. Not in any sense. Is not and was not. It's the future I'm interested in. Our future, yours and mine. That's what I want to talk about.

HUSBAND

Do you have feelings for this man?

PAMELA

Let's just forget him, okay?

HUSBAND

Do you have feelings?

PAMELA

I have complicated feelings.

HUSBAND

Is it Jack?

PAMELA

Please stop calling him that, it's not his name.

HUSBAND

Not his name. I'm sorry. Not his name, how is that?

PAMELA

It's not important how it is.

HUSBAND

Not his name...?

PAMELA

It's not important who it is or who the man is. What's important is what's happening to me. And to us. Right now, this moment.

HUSBAND

But is it him? Jack, or whatever his name is? Is it him? Is it him? Is it him is it him IS IT HIM?

PAMELA

Yes.

HUSBAND

Of course it's him. Of course of course. He's the man in the St. Regis.

PAMELA

The man in the St. Regis...

HUSBAND

The attractive man. Asking questions. I mean, there he was - praising you right to my face.

PAMELA

You're joking.

HUSBAND

Just today. To my own face.

PAMELA

It couldn't have been what you think.

HUSBAND

What was it?

PAMELA

I don't know. I wasn't there.

HUSBAND

So - you gave him the picture.

PAMELA

I did not give him the picture.

HUSBAND

Oh, please...

PAMELA

He took the picture himself.

HUSBAND

You gave him that picture, a picture I adore?

PAMELA

I did not give it to him!

HUSBAND

So he's in love with you. Why else would he take it unless he's in love with you?

PAMELA

He's not in love with me.

HUSBAND

You know this how?

PAMELA

He told me he's not.

HUSBAND

So you two have discussed the matter, discussed love.

PAMELA

No. Not - discussed, just...

HUSBAND

Why else would he take the picture?

PAMELA

It's too complicated to explain.

HUSBAND

You could have given it to him. You might have. Why not? He's a nice-looking man. He's a sexy man.

PAMELA

Christ.

HUSBAND

What was it? What's between you? Is it love? Do you love him? Or is it sex?

PAMELA

There is no sex.

HUSBAND

Not yet there isn't. Not to date.

PAMELA

Look, I'm doing this for us. I'm not asking you to judge, I'm asking for your help, as a friend, as my best friend in the world.

HUSBAND

How can I not judge?

PAMELA

Fine, fine. Judge then, but don't...

HUSBAND

Is it love? Are you in love?

PAMELA

I am. Yes. I am in love.

HUSBAND

Ah-hah. Ah-hah. And where do you meet?

PAMELA

We don't meet! I've only ever seen him twice, both times right here.

HUSBAND

So you've been meeting here.

PAMELA

Not "meeting" here.

HUSBAND

Then what, right here?

PAMELA

I'm saying, I'm saying I've done nothing wrong. There's been nothing physical, no physical contact of any kind.

HUSBAND

Not yet.

PAMELA

There never will be any. Look, just blame me, all right?

HUSBAND

Blame you when you say you've done nothing wrong.

PAMELA

Yes. No. I haven't done anything. Nothing.

HUSBAND

Nothing but love. You say it's love.

PAMELA

Yes. On my part.

HUSBAND

Yet he took your picture. While you're completely innocent.

PAMELA

I'm not innocent. I have all these feelings. These thoughts. But he is, yes, he's completely innocent.

HUSBAND

How? How is he innocent?

PAMELA

You ought to be glad nothing's happened! And that nothing will happen!

HUSBAND

I'd love some details.

PAMELA

God damn it. God damn it. No, you do not want "details."

HUSBAND

I don't understand. Why are you even telling me all this?

PAMELA

Bcause I want you to know! I want you to know my feelings! I want you to know what I'm going through so I can get out of this endless round of, of, of...

HUSBAND

Of guilt. It's guilt. Isn't it?

PAMELA

Yes.

HUSBAND

Well then you must be guilty of something. Something more than just having feelings.

PAMELA

I'm trying to salvage us in the midst of all this.

HUSBAND

Salvage us...!

PAMELA

I'm saying - you and me. Remember? Our little corner of paradise. Our lives. Everything we've had and still have.

HUSBAND

I see. All right.

PAMELA

We've never had secrets.

HUSBAND

And you wanted me to know. That's very admirable.

PAMELA

You're hurt.

HUSBAND

I am hurt, yes.

PAMELA

I'm sorry.

HUSBAND

How did you think I'd feel? What did you think would happen when you told me?

PAMELA

I didn't plan to tell you.

HUSBAND

Did you think I'd jump for joy? Or thank you? Oh yes, thank you, Pamela, for making me feel like total hell. For turning our world to shit. And all my friends? Congratulate me, please! I have the best wife in the whole world. The only wife who'd confess to an affair to salvage her marriage.

PAMELA

It's not an affair. It's not an affair.

HUSBAND

Even better. Who'd confess to a non-affair. Confess to nothing. Pamela. What were you thinking?

PAMELA

I was trying to find some peace of mind. Peace in our house, peace with God. Obviously I will not find it with you.

HUSBAND

You know, you can't just walk all over me.

PAMELA

I'm not, I'm not walking over you.

HUSBAND

And I will not let myself be walked over.

PAMELA

I was trying to be good. To be a good wife.

HUSBAND

You have been one. You are one. You're the best of wives and the best of women. I'm sorry you had to prove it by stabbing me through the heart.

PAMELA

Oh my God - sweetheart...

HUSBAND

How long?

PAMELA

What.

HUSBAND

How long has this, whatever, this non-affair been going on?

PAMELA

I said, nothing has been going on.

HUSBAND

You've met, you've talked, you've what?

PAMELA

Nothing, nothing, nothing. How many times do I have to say it?

HUSBAND

No. Fine. You've said it all. I know everything now. Everything and nothing. I do know this. You have walked all over me. Listen to me. Knowing me to be your willing idiot, you have taken advantage.

PAMELA

No.

HUSBAND

And I have walked all over myself. Well, I will not be walked over. What in God's name have I been a good and faithful husband for?

PAMELA

I've been faithful.

HUSBAND

Years of it! Years of trying to be so good! Never even looking at another woman!

PAMELA

Well. Are you even interested in women?

HUSBAND

Ah. Ah, ah, ah. I see.

PAMELA

I'm sorry.

HUSBAND

Lovely. So you'd even go there to justify yourself.

PAMELA

I'm not trying to justify myself.

HUSBAND

Fuck you. Fuck. You. Darling. So go to him. Go to Jack!

PAMELA

I'm not going to anyone...

HUSBAND

You're going to leave me, aren't you? Then do it!

PAMELA

No. No. I will never leave you.

HUSBAND

Shall we divide things up? What do you want? Shall I cut this book in half? Shall I cut this couch in half, this room? In half? Give me a knife, I'll do it!

PAMELA

Listen to me. Sweetheart. My love.

HUSBAND

"My love." Yes. "My love." Did you know, my love, that you married a very stupid man?

PAMELA

I married the best man in the -

HUSBAND

No. You married a stupid man. Stupid, stupid, stupid. Ah, well. So be it. I'm stupid, you're in love. So be it, amen, end of story.

PAMELA

So what do we do, about all this, about us?

HUSBAND

Obviously nothing's happened, there's nothing to be done. Everyone's innocent.

PAMELA

Talk to me. Look at me. Come back to me, please. Please, love.

HUSBAND

Listen. I have some work in my study, I think I'm going to tend to that before I leave.

PAMELA

Please.

HUSBAND

Maybe you could see to the dogs, I think they've gotten inside. They're probably making a mess somewhere. Will you do that?

PAMELA

Yes.

HUSBAND

Will you look after the dogs for me?

PAMELA

Yes.

HUSBAND

I just. I want to think. I have to write up something.

PAMELA

I love you. I love you so much.

HUSBAND

Yes. The harmonious machine. Go on. Go, tend to the dogs.
All will be well.

PAMELA

Yes. It will. All will be well.

HUSBAND

"It is necessary, it is behovely." You know the text.

PAMELA

It will be well. Everything. I swear.

HUSBAND

See you anon.

(THE HUSBAND EXITS.)

PAMELA

Richard...!

(But he's gone. The room is quite dim by now.)

"It is necessary, it is behovely that sin is the cause of
all this pain. But all shall be well, and all shall be
well, and all manner of thing shall be well. Since he
blameth not me for sin. And in these words I saw a
marvelous high mystery hid in God, which mystery He shall
openly make known to us."

(GUNSHOT heard.)

No... No, no, no, no, no.

(PAMELA rushes out.)

(THE DETECTIVE ENTERS and turns on a lamp. HE blows
on his hands to warm them. LIGHTS CHANGE to...)

SCENE FOUR.

(Autumn. Afternoon. MOTHER ENTERS, walking on a cane and carrying some large, empty trash bags.)

MOTHER

What are you doin' here?

DETECTIVE

Where is she? Is she with you?

MOTHER

No, she is not. I come for some of her stuff like we agreed. And we agreed you were not gonna be here. Now go get lost someplace. I don't want to smell you within a hundred yards of me.

DETECTIVE

I thought she was coming.

MOTHER

Now why in God's name would she ever want to come back here? To this house? Can you tell me that?

DETECTIVE

If I could just talk to her for a -

MOTHER

Oh, no. Uh-uh.

DETECTIVE

Well, would you pass her a note?

MOTHER

She ain't gonna see you, she ain't gonna talk to you, she don't want nothin' to do with you. So stop callin' and stop sendin' us papers. You hear me? We don't want no settlement. We don't want to contest. We sure don't want none of his money. Which is now your filthy money.

DETECTIVE

It wasn't legal.

MOTHER

You think we don't know that?

DETECTIVE

A scribble on a piece of paper?

MOTHER

The two of you destroyed my daughter. Is that legal? She fell for whatever garbage you were peddling, same way she fell for him. Is that legal?

DETECTIVE

Guilty.

MOTHER

Now I'm gonna get a coupla things she left behind. After that, it's all yours.

DETECTIVE

I don't want any of it.

MOTHER

Sell it off. Burn it down and salt the earth, we don't care. But you know what he scribbled on that paper? Maybe you read that in the news? He said he was leavin' it all to you because you were "innocent." Yeah. Innocent, he says. And you know why he done it, shot himself through the heart? So she would know she sent him to hell for all eternity. How is that girl gonna live her life with that? How is she gonna live in this world? And I don't mean money. Pamela is a special person, she always was. You're a detective and you didn't notice that? You didn't see some clues? You didn't think something bad might happen?

DETECTIVE

Guilty again.

MOTHER

She come home to me, she threw up for a month straight. She knelt down at the toilet and stayed there for a month. So while you're here and I got the chance, lemme tell you this to your face: you go to hell.

DETECTIVE

Okay.

MOTHER

Straight to hell, straight back to hell, mister.

DETECTIVE

Okay. Okay.

(MOTHER sits down suddenly.)

Are you all right...?

MOTHER

I got a cancer comin' back in five places. I got six months to live. Is that all right?

DETECTIVE

Can I get you something? Call somebody? Do you want a brandy?

MOTHER

No, I just gotta catch my breath here for a second.

DETECTIVE

(slightly overlapping her)

I just gotta catch my breath here for a second.

MOTHER

Say what...?

DETECTIVE

I knew that's what you were about to say. "I just gotta catch my breath here for a second."

MOTHER

What're you talking about?

DETECTIVE

We've never met before, have we?

MOTHER

On the phone, for a minute...

DETECTIVE

Never mind. Déjà vu all over again...

MOTHER

Let me get something straight. Back then. She called you, called you in here? For something?

DETECTIVE

Yeah. She thought she'd done something wrong. Can I just, somehow, talk to her for a second?

MOTHER

You know what, mister? You don't wanna talk to her and you sure don't wanna see her. Now get outta here and let me do what I come for.

(PAMELA ENTERS. Dissheveled.)

PAMELA

It's all right, Ma. Let him stay. It's his house.

MOTHER

Pammy - Pammy, honey, you don't want to be in here.

PAMELA

Sit down, Ma. Sit, go on.

MOTHER

He wasn't supposed to be here. Sweetheart, go back to the car, wait for me.

PAMELA

It's okay, Ma. I said it's okay. Just rest yourself.

DETECTIVE

Hello, Pamela.

PAMELA

Mr. Skelton. Quote-unquote.

(We are realizing that PAMELA is quite drunk.)

DETECTIVE

How are you?

PAMELA

I'm good. I'm very good.

DETECTIVE

Yeah?

PAMELA

Nice place you got here. And just look at that garden.
All the fall colors...

(PAMELA begins to shiver violently.)

DETECTIVE

Is it too cold for you?

MOTHER

Are you okay, sweetheart? Can I get you a jacket?

PAMELA

So are you living here now? Master of Wishwood?

DETECTIVE

No, the place has been shut up.

PAMELA

What did you do with the dogs? Did you have them killed?

DETECTIVE

I have the dogs. They're fine.

PAMELA

Send them my love, will you, please. My very best love...
(PAMELA notices the PICTURE. She turns it face down
on the table.)

So are you still detecting?

DETECTIVE

Only my heartbeat. Yeah. Still there.

PAMELA

Ha, ha.

DETECTIVE

You know, I didn't want this.

PAMELA

Oh, no? Oh, no? Didn't you tell me you wanted a Greenwich
estate? You must have wanted it, it's what you got. Isn't
that right, Ma? What you get is what you want?

MOTHER

Oh, Pammy...

PAMELA

Just ask my mother. She'll tell you. So what are you
going to do with it, now you got it?

DETECTIVE

Follow your example. Give it to charity.

PAMELA

So I guess the cat was dead, huh. The cat in the black box.

DETECTIVE

You tell me.

MOTHER

Sit down, honey. Please. Take my place here.

PAMELA

Don't touch me.

MOTHER

Oh, sweetheart. Don't be that way.

PAMELA

Are you still stopping in churches?

DETECTIVE

Once in a while. I go with my friend Tom Eliot. He tells me when to sit and when to stand. When to kneel.

PAMELA

Funny man. But you always were. Aren't you going to offer me a drink?

MOTHER

No, Pammy. Don't.

DETECTIVE

Did you want one?

PAMELA

I've been drinking since dawn, myself. I'll have a double bourbon, please.

DETECTIVE

Pamela, talk to me. How are you? Where are you?

PAMELA

I? I am on the wheel. You know the wheel.

(Makes a turning wheel with her finger:)

Expiating, expiating, expiating. The question is, for what? Huh? Expiating for WHAT.

MOTHER

Honey.

PAMELA

What did I do? I told my husband the truth. Didn't you teach me to always tell the truth? Didn't you teach me that?

MOTHER

Yes, honey.

PAMELA

So what did I do wrong? What did I do wrong, Ma?

MOTHER

Nothing, sweetheart.

PAMELA

NOTHING. I DID NOTHING. I! DID! NOTHING! Or. Maybe I got exactly what I wanted. Maybe I wanted this house off my back, maybe I wanted him dead and you, sir, were the man to help me do it. My accomplice. My savior. But here was my fatal mistake. I fell for you.

MOTHER

Pammy, honey, let's go home.

PAMELA

Because you, you of all people, you made me feel something I had never felt before. That craziness. That insanity. That lethal heat. What the simple people used to call love.

MOTHER

Pammy.

PAMELA

And yet. Something went wrong in there somewhere. In spite of love. The all-conquering. You want to tell me where, Mr. Detective?

DETECTIVE

Look, I didn't want any of this to happen.

PAMELA

Does anybody? Ever? Does anybody ever want any of this this this THIS to happen? Still. It was bound to happen. You know why? Ask me why.

DETECTIVE

Why was all this bound to happen?

PAMELA

Because I'm Pamela Palmer. Because I am who I am who I am who I am. And I'm so sorry about that, somehow. I'm so...

MOTHER

(quietly, to DETECTIVE)
Go to her. Go on. Talk to her.

(THE MOTHER EXITS.)

PAMELA

After it happened, I actually thought of going into a convent. But you know you can't just go into a convent the way you used to.

DETECTIVE

Listen to me.

PAMELA

They don't just take you in.

DETECTIVE

Stop.

PAMELA

So where should I go...?

DETECTIVE

Stop. Now listen to me.
(He holds her. She lets him.)
I have an idea. I have a plan.

PAMELA

You want to marry me.

DETECTIVE

No.

PAMELA

You want to fuck me.

DETECTIVE

I want to look at you and listen to you and talk to you for the rest of your life. Just that much. No strings. If you want to, you can look at me from time to time.

PAMELA

And where would all this happen?

DETECTIVE

I don't know, we'll figure it out. All I want is for you to let me be with you, in your presence, in your aura, to the end of your days.

PAMELA

We weren't made for each other.

DETECTIVE

No. No, we became that.

PAMELA

I have a plan.

DETECTIVE

Tell me.

PAMELA

My plan is - we stay exactly the way we've always been, the way we are right now. Two dragonflies fixed in amber, flying toward each other but never meeting. Burning burning burning forever and ever and ever and ever. Shh, shh, shh.

(PAMELA kisses him lightly.)

I thank you. I love you. I'm sorry.

(THE MOTHER has re-entered with full trash bags.)

Mama, let's go home.

(PAMELA EXITS.)

MOTHER

(calls after PAMELA)

Don't you go wandering off nowhere, honey! You go straight to the car!

(To THE DETECTIVE:)

Am I gonna have to go before God and answer for my daughter? Huh? I took that girl to church, I taught her good manners, I taught her faith hope and charity, was that not enough? Or wrong? And, yeah, I taught her to tell the truth, was that wrong somehow? Did I lead her to him, or to here, or to you, or to any of this? And am I gonna go to hell now for all eternity?

DETECTIVE

I don't know.

MOTHER

I don't know neither. What do I know? I don't know nothin'.

(MOTHER EXITS, leaving the DETECTIVE.)

SCENE FIVE.

(Morning. Spring. PAMELA ENTERS exactly as at the top of the play.)

PAMELA

Thank you so much for coming. Would this be all right, in here?

DETECTIVE

Looks good enough. Why not.

PAMELA

I love this room. It's so nice and bright. And having the garden right there is so fun.

DETECTIVE

Uh-huh. Satin upholstery. Real French windows. Very perfect. Anybody's bottom ever touch these chairs?

PAMELA

I sit in them all the time. Listening to music. Reading.

DETECTIVE

Murder mysteries? Country house, locked room, body on the floor?

PAMELA

Sometimes.

DETECTIVE

Well, you got the right setting. So did "Wishwood" come with the joint?

PAMELA

Wishwood. No, we named it that. I don't remember why. Maybe it's from a Henry James novel. I seem to recall it was my husband's idea.

DETECTIVE

I guess it's a mystery.

PAMELA

The garden's just coming into bloom, we could sit out there.

DETECTIVE

Have you ever been a model?

PAMELA

I'm sorry?

DETECTIVE

A clothes model, in the magazines, maybe on TV?

PAMELA

Oh, I have too many imperfections to be a model.

DETECTIVE

As who among us does not. I dunno, I just got this funny déjà vu feeling I've seen you someplace before...

(A pause.)

So. Pamela Palmer. Why am I here?

(LIGHTS FADE ON THEM. END OF PLAY.)