

"Infidelity in Devotion"

by

Mick Axelrod

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Infidelity in Devotion

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CHARACTERS

| | |
|--------|---------------------------------|
| Karen | A woman trying to get pregnant. |
| Mario | Her co-worker/friend. |
| Ashley | Karen's sister/co-worker. |
| Bill | Karen's husband. |

SETTING

A break-room and a dining room.

TIME

The present.

SCENES

ACT I

| | | |
|---------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Scene 1 | The break-room. | Now. |
| Scene 2 | The break-room. | 4 months later. |
| Scene 3 | Karen's dining room. | 4 months later. |

"It is a wise father that knows his own child."

-- William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

"Biology is the least of what makes someone a mother."

-- Oprah Winfrey

"I know I am but summer to your heart, and not the full
four seasons of the year."

-- Edna St. Vincent Millay

ACT I

SCENE 1

(LIGHTS UP. A table and four chairs are set on the STAGE, as well as a garbage pail off to a side. Talking on the phone, pacing, is KAREN, mid-conversation.)

KAREN

...look, I'm not blaming you! No, I didn't say that. Bill, stop putting words in my mouth!

(Karen sits, frustrated, taking abuse through the phone.)

KAREN

It's not that big a deal, Bill. We'll keep trying. Yeah. Yeah. (mumbles) I love you too. Maybe. We'll see how I'm feeling when I get home. Bye.

(She holds her head in her hands and cries. Enter MARIO with his lunch, something microwaveable. Karen tries to cover up her tears. Mario puts the food down on the table and puts arms around her.)

MARIO

Whoa, Karen! What's going on? What's the matter, doll-face?

KAREN

Nothing, Mario. Just the same stuff. I'm fine.

MARIO

He get tested yet?

KAREN

Not yet. I have an appointment in a week.

MARIO

You're too fine for the problem to be on your end. The problem's on his, I guarantee it. Your mom's had what, five kids?

(He lets go of her, sits down at his food.)

KAREN

Four. But no, conceiving's never been an issue for my family. My older sister got pregnant on her honeymoon, and Ashley got pregnant her first ti...oh shit, I shouldn't have told you that.

MARIO

What? Why? What difference does it make?

KAREN

She's my sister, it's her personal life, and she works here too.

MARIO

How do you know she didn't tell me already?

KAREN

Did she tell you before?

MARIO

Well, no. Probably wouldn't have, her crushing on me so hard. It's like she tries to show me her best side but it always feels like she's hiding something.

KAREN

Well, she is, and what I just told you was the tip of the iceberg. I wouldn't let her get her claws into you, if you ask my opinion. Forget I said that - I'm just emotional.

MARIO

It's all right. You don't have to tell me at any rate. I'm not really into her.

KAREN

I figured as much or else you'd have succumbed to her wiles by now.

MARIO

Oh, absolutely. Besides...I'm much more into you.

KAREN

Excuse me?

MARIO

Did I just say that out loud?

KAREN

Uhm, yeah, you did. (beat) I gotta go.

(She heads for the door, Mario grabs her arm.)

MARIO

Wait. I didn't mean that. I mean, I did, I do; it's just not something that's, like, major. So, I sweat you a little, no big deal - should that affect our friendship?

KAREN

(beat)

Yes, it should.

(She turns to the door, Mario grabs her again.)

MARIO

What? Why? There's no reason why my being attracted to you should impact our being friends.

KAREN

Oh yes it should. Or even if it shouldn't, it does, all right?

MARIO

There's no reason for it unless....

(They lock eyes. His suspicion is confirmed.)

MARIO

You do, don't you?

KAREN

Goddammit, Mario, now is not a good time for this.

MARIO

Why not? There is no time like the present. Carpe diem.

KAREN

We're not seizing anything, all right? I'm a married woman and despite some...arguments lately I love my husband very much. Even if there is...something here, it's best to ignore it.

MARIO

And live in regret? I don't doubt you love your husband but you two have not been right for a while, even without the problems conceiving. Having a baby won't fix your relationship.

KAREN

I don't think it will! It's just...what I want, okay?

MARIO

I'll give you one, you want one so bad. Prove once and for all he's the one who's having the issues, not you.

KAREN

We don't know that for sure.

MARIO

But he won't even look into it! He doesn't love you enough to go jerk off into a cup to spare you getting your goddamn cervix scraped!

KAREN

He does love me!

MARIO

Just not enough to spare you an unnecessary medical procedure.

(Karen pushes Mario, digs into him.)

KAREN

So what the fuck is this then? Your love for me? Getting me so fired up I can't even see straight? Is this your idea of being a friend to me? What do you think's going to happen? "Oh, Mario, you're so right: Bill's such a big asshole for not being willing to see a specialist with me, puts the responsibility on my end. Let's just fuck on the break-room table, that'll make everything better!" Is that what you're looking for?

MARIO

Yes.

(Karen slaps him. She starts crying softly.)

KAREN

God damn it. Goddammit! Why are you being an asshole now? Now when I need your friendship more than ever?

MARIO

This is me being a friend. Yes, I want you, but fucking forget me and Bill. Just you - just focus on you. You know Bill is not good for you.

KAREN

He's the best thing that ever happened to me.

MARIO

He was. In high school. You're twenty-five years old, god damn it, and I don't think he's grown a day since then. He's still got everything he ever wanted from you so why should he fight for anything? Give him a challenge, make him fight for you, damn it! Make him remember what a prize he has in his hands and be afraid of losing you.

KAREN

(through the tears)

How...how do I do that?

MARIO

Kiss me.

KAREN

Okay.

(She does. They come up against the table. They stop after a passionate kiss and breathe heavily for a moment, the sexual tension underscoring a long pause.)

MARIO

That was better than I imagined it'd be.

KAREN

Way, way better.

(They kiss again. It goes on for a moment before Mario pulls them apart, after Karen starts pushing Mario onto the table.)

MARIO

Whoa. Whoa. What're you doing?

KAREN

I want you to give me a baby.

MARIO

Whoa, what? Like, right here?

KAREN

Right now.

MARIO

Uhm...Karen, we're at work. Besides, my break's almost up.

KAREN

And? I'm your boss technically. I can give you a longer lunch if I want.

MARIO

What is this? Why are you doing this?

KAREN

I told you, I want you to give me a baby.

MARIO

And? What happens then?

KAREN

Then we're done. I go back to my husband, sleep with him tonight, and he'll never know the baby isn't his. Your hair, your skin, your eyes; you look enough like him he'd never question it.

MARIO

Whoa, whoa! You're talking about using me! What...what if that's not enough for me?

KAREN

It's the best you're going to get: sperm donation. I'll let you do it the fun way, but you only get one night, then we're done. Take it or leave it.

MARIO

I will take one blissful night with you...

KAREN

Okay. Get on the table and undo your pants.

MARIO

...but not here. Not now. I want to do it right. I want to take you to dinner first, get a nice hotel room...

KAREN

Nice hotel, yes. Dinner, no.

MARIO

What? Why not?

KAREN

Because I don't need a date. I already know I want you. It's a sure thing, Mario. Let's just meet, fuck, and get it over with. Besides...it'll be less like cheating this way. I'm not trying to tear down what I have with Bill, I just need you to make a baby for him.

MARIO

(beat)

Okay.

KAREN

Really?

MARIO

Yeah, really.

(She hugs him.)

KAREN

Okay! Good! Just remember, it's a one-time deal. No fuss, no strings attached. You just give me what I need and that's it.

MARIO

Yes. I got it. Enough.

KAREN

Sorry. So, when should we do this?

MARIO

Can you get away tonight?

KAREN

It's not enough time. Tomorrow night?

MARIO

Doesn't work for me. I've got a thing. Besides, I should probably wait at least a day, store up, before we give it a go. It being one shot and all.

KAREN

You have a point. How long do they make you wait before donating sperm?

MARIO

Five days without ejaculating. (beat) So I've heard.

(Karen pulls out her phone and looks at her calendar.)

KAREN

That...would work for me, actually.

(Mario does so in kind.)

MARIO

For me too.

KAREN

(typing into her phone)

Okay - it's set.

MARIO

You're putting your scheduled extramarital affair into your phone?

KAREN

I put it in as "Girl's Night." Thank you, (she hugs him) this means so much to me that you'd do this.

MARIO

Not entirely altruistic, but sure. I'd do a lot more for you if you needed.

KAREN

I know you would. (breaking the hug) Okay, I gotta get back to work. You take your time finishing your lunch, you hear?

(Mario nods. Karen exits. Mario meanders over his meal, poking it more than eating it.)

MARIO

What am I doing? Why am I doing this? It's going to make it weird, isn't it? Of course it is. How do you have a baby with someone you've been in love with for ages and it not become weird? What's worse, he...or she will never know who their real father is. She'll surely bring the baby in to work, and how am I supposed to stand there and not fawn, not desire to be near my child? Is one blissful night with Karen worth a lifetime of coming heartache.

(Enter ASHLEY with a brown bag lunch.)

ASHLEY

Hi, Mario. I heard you talking to someone but no one's here.

MARIO
(eating again)
I was talking to myself, Ash.

ASHLEY
Uh-oh, you know what they say about people who talk to themselves.

MARIO
The smartest people who ever lived spoke to themselves. It's if someone answers back that you have a problem.

ASHLEY
Oh. Well, I talk to myself all the time.

MARIO
Deciding a wardrobe doesn't count, Ashley.

ASHLEY
Jeez, what crawled up your butt and died? What's wrong?

MARIO
(getting up, throwing out what's left of lunch)
Nothing. I just have a lot on my mind. My break's almost up.

ASHLEY
And what a fascinating mind it is. Let me know if you need to talk to someone. I'm always here for you.

(Mario looks as if he's about to spill his guts.)

MARIO
Thanks. That's kind of you. Well - see you.

(Mario exits. Ashley sits and undoes her bag.)

ASHLEY
Oh, Mario. You know you're going to be mine, right? One of these days, Mario, you'll let your guard down and I'm going to slip right into that dear little heart of yours. You just wait and see. I'll be here waiting.

(Ashley takes a bite of her sandwich as the LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.)

SCENE 2

(LIGHTS UP. A table and four chairs are set on the STAGE, as well as a garbage pail off to a side. KAREN, who has a baby bump indicative of about four months, and ASHLEY sit and talk over respective lunches, mid-conversation.)

KAREN

...said saltines would help in the morning, but all they do is make me thirstier.

ASHLEY

Do things smell strange in the morning?

KAREN

Besides Bill's feet and farts, no.

ASHLEY

Well, those might be doing it to you. They say pregnant women's sense of smell becomes really sensitive, can really put her off. Also, you should probably brush your teeth first thing, Karen.

KAREN

Are you kidding me? Brushing?

ASHLEY

Yeah. I don't know, some article I glanced at recommended brushing to help off-set morning sickness. I think it has to do with the smell thing.

KAREN

Why were you looking over an article on morning sickness?

ASHLEY

Because my big sister is pregnant. Should I stay in ignorance and not know what you're going through?

KAREN

Bullshit. You probably read up on it during your own brief bout of pregnancy.

ASHLEY

Hey! Don't bring that up at work, okay? You never know who's listening.

KAREN

You're right. I'm sorry. Sometimes I say things without thinking.

ASHLEY

I'll say. At least you're not blaming it on your hormones.

KAREN

Oh, I know what you mean. I hate when women use their hormones as an excuse to act bitchy. I mean, yeah, this sucks and I feel like jumping down people's throats when they're acting shitty, but I have enough control to not be a thunder-snatch. Periods ain't got nothing on pregnancy.

ASHLEY

I dunno, my period makes me want to claw everyone's eyes out. Even my own. I don't know if that's the hormones or if I'm just a bitch.

KAREN

Nope, you're just a bitch.

ASHLEY

Oh ha ha!

(Ashley playfully pushes her sister's head. Karen does the same in kind.)

KAREN

Bitch sensor activated! Launching probes into orbit around Bitchalon 5!

ASHLEY

God, you're such a dork! Your kid is going to be such a nerd.

KAREN

I've already gotten the baby Star Trek feetie pajamas. Officer's uniform.

ASHLEY

Like I said. When are you gonna know if it's a boy or girl?

KAREN

I have a check-up appointment next week. But I'm not sure if I want to know the gender.

ASHLEY

Why the hell not? How are you supposed to get the shopping done and the baby room ready without knowing what it's gonna be?

KAREN

Because I want to be surprised. I want to hear the doctors say, "It's a..." well, whatever it turns out to be. And as far as shopping, we're getting a lot of gender-neutral stuff, and we're gonna set the room up with an ocean theme. It'll work whether it's a boy or girl.

ASHLEY

That's so lame. Your kid's gonna be gay.

KAREN

Excuse me?

ASHLEY

Without early development establishing clearly defined gender roles, children gravitate toward abstraction from the norms.

KAREN

(looking cock-headed at Ashley)

You feeling all right, Ash?

ASHLEY

Yeah, why?

KAREN

You just used a whole slew of five-dollar words in a technically correct way, despite it being prejudiced, bigoted, and wholly inaccurate.

ASHLEY

Everyone presumes I'm dumb, just because I don't spout off like a rocket scientist all the time. And I'm entitled to my own opinion as to gender identity development, thank you very much.

(Enter MARIO with his lunch. He surveys the scene and who is sitting at the table. He does about-face.)

ASHLEY

Hey, Mario! Where're you going?

MARIO

Gonna go take lunch under the tree out back.

ASHLEY

There's plenty of room at the table here.

MARIO

I'd like some fresh air, thanks.

ASHLEY

Oh come on, keep us company. Besides, we were just talking about baby stuff and we need to change the topic. Nothing is more abhorrent to men than talk of babies and their necessities. You'll do just fine here!

KAREN

Ashley, don't force him. You don't have to stay, Mario.

MARIO

Do you want me too?

(Karen looks up at him, nods quickly, goes back to her lunch. Mario sits down, sets into eating. Ashley surveys the two.)

ASHLEY

Everything all right between the two of you?

MARIO

Yeah, fine....

KAREN

Why do you ask?

ASHLEY

Because there's enough tension between you to make a violin string jealous.

MARIO

I'm not tense - I just have...

ASHLEY

A lot on your mind. So you say. So why's my sister on your mind?

KAREN

Ashley! Cut it out! Stop being a bitch.

ASHLEY

You better not be having an affair. I'll kill you if you went after my interests.

KAREN

Nothing is going on between...

(Mario gets up.)

MARIO

I'm just gonna go outside...

KAREN

No. Sit down. I want to talk to you anyway. Ashley, your break's up, get back to work.

(Mario remains standing.)

ASHLEY

What? I still have...two minutes!

KAREN

How about I let you leave two minutes early then?

(Ashley jumps up, leaving her trash, heads for the exit.)

ASHLEY

This is so unfair! I'm telling mom!

KAREN

I'm shaking.

(Ashley exits after flipping her sister off. Karen and Mario stand in silence for a moment.)

MARIO

How's the baby?

KAREN

Good. Growing strong. Gonna start kicking any day now.

MARIO

She hasn't started yet?

KAREN

No, the baby hasn't yet. And I'm gonna wait for the delivery to find out the sex. You think it's a girl?

MARIO

Call it an intuition. If it is, I would hope you might consider calling her Olivia. That was my mother's name.

KAREN

It's...a very pretty name. I'll consider it.

MARIO

That's all I ask.

(A silence falls between them.)

KAREN

This has to stop.

MARIO

Lunch?

KAREN

You know what I mean. Avoiding me. It's clear there's something up between us, Ashley just called us on it.

MARIO

She's observant. More observant than we gave her credit for.

KAREN

Others will notice too, just give it time. Especially if you say something.

MARIO

I am not some gossiping girl. I swore secrecy and I shall ever abide.

KAREN

So what is this then? Why are you behaving like this?

MARIO

Because my heart is broken.

KAREN

Stop that! You knew the terms and conditions, you agreed to them. You knew this wasn't the start of something.

MARIO

Then why did we meet more than the once we initially agreed on?

KAREN

Dammit, Mario, we went over this already. It didn't take the first time. We had to do it again, to get me...where I am.

MARIO

And you didn't enjoy yourself?

KAREN

I did. Of course I did. I never...experienced that with Bill, what I did with you.

MARIO

It wasn't better?

KAREN

It was different.

MARIO

And you don't love me.

KAREN

I do, Mario; as a friend. I'm not available, I'm married. In another world, another life it might have been different between us, I might have been able to open my heart to you like you want. But I can't. I have responsibilities.

MARIO

Hell of a marriage, built on responsibility and not love.

KAREN

Marriages are built on both. And work. No relationship is built on a single principle.

MARIO

You have strange ones; principles: fathering a child for you husband with another man.

KAREN

Don't you dare judge me. I have enough shit in my life, enough people laying their opinions and positions, I don't need it from you, who's supposed to be my friend.

MARIO

And what about you? Aren't you supposed to be my friend? You've practically ignored me for the past three months! Ever since you found out you were pregnant, I've been just another employee - like I don't even register on your radar.

KAREN

What do you want, Mario, a hug and a kiss when we pass in the hallway? I can't jeopardize my life, Mario. I won't.

MARIO

This is my thanks for giving you a child.

KAREN

For all intents and purposes, you did not. My husband did. Do you understand me?

MARIO

Yes. Yes, I understand. I'll...I'll stop. It will take every ounce of me but I'll stop this, okay? Can we just go back to how we were?

KAREN

Can we?

(They stand in silence a moment. Mario moves in and hugs her. After an awkward moment, Karen concedes and hugs him back.)

MARIO

I missed this.

KAREN

(beat)

Me too.

(Mario breaks the hug. Sits down.)

MARIO

How is Bill doing with all this?

KAREN

He doesn't suspect at all.

MARIO

That isn't what I meant. How is he handling all this? Potential fatherhood.

KAREN

Oh. Uh, good. Very good, actually. He's excited, driven in a way I've never seen before. He's looking forward to becoming a father, taking a very active role.

MARIO

I'm glad for that. I wasn't certain he would accept that it was his, or that he'd live up to the expectation. (beat) Can I touch your stomach?

KAREN

What? Why?

MARIO

To say hello. And goodbye.

KAREN

(beat)

Okay. Yeah. Sure.

(Mario does, caressing her stomach tenderly. The baby kicks.)

KAREN

Oh my God. Did you feel that?

(Karen cries as Mario ramps up his speech.)

MARIO

I did. She knows her daddy is here. (to Karen's belly) Hello, little one. Hello, Olivia. I am sorry I will not be there for you. I should very much like to be. I love your mother very much, and I think she loves me too, but as you will learn, the Fates do not always give love the liberty it longs for. You will be well provided for, you will be loved. That is all that matters. You will not know me, but the man who will raise you is a good man; though I've never met him, he must be, because your mother is so devoted to him. He will raise you well, I hope; listen to what he says. Thank you for letting your father know of you now. I shall miss you and think of you always.

KAREN

(quietly through her tears)

You're fired.

MARIO

What did you say?

KAREN

(strengthening herself, more loudly)

I said, you're fired.

MARIO

I must have misheard you.

KAREN

You did not. I said you're fired.

MARIO

What? Why?

KAREN

I can't do this, Mario. I can't live like this. I can't see you every day, I can't bring my baby here and have you staring at her from a distance. How can I bring her here and have everybody hold her and deny her to you? I can't bear this Mario, I can't do this to you or her.

(Mario stays silent, nodding.)

MARIO

You can't do this. It's illegal.

KAREN

I know it is. My only other option is to quit. If you want to stay here, I will.

MARIO

No. No, don't quit. I'll do it. It'll be easier to explain than your firing me, or laying me off.

KAREN

You don't have to do that. I can at least lay you off, you'll get unemployment that way.

MARIO

It's okay. I have some savings. I'll be okay for a bit. (beat) I've already got some applications sent out.

KAREN

You were planning to do this?

MARIO

It...has been...difficult being here. I was going to tell you when I found something.

KAREN

You would have done that? For me?

MARIO

No, for me. I thought of it, of watching our child grow in front of me, my hands tied to being a part of her rearing. It hurts me...but I knew it was the right thing to do. For all of us.

(Karen nods, solemnly. Mario approaches her with an air of gravity.)

MARIO

I will always cherish the nights we had, and the gift you gave me.

(He runs his hand across her jaw and cheek and kisses her tenderly. She kisses him back. Enter Ashley.)

ASHLEY

What the fuck is this!

(The kissing couple break apart.)

ASHLEY

In the break-room? In the goddamn break-room!

MARIO

This isn't what it seems!

KAREN

What are you doing back here? Why aren't you out front?

ASHLEY

I needed to get something from my locker. And I wanted to apologize to you and Mario for accusing you of an affair. Of course my intuition was right!

MARIO

It's not an affair. I was just saying goodbye.

ASHLEY

With your tongue? And what do you mean, saying goodbye?

MARIO

I got another job. Putting my degree to use. Today's my last day; I was giving Karen a hug and something came over me, okay? I kissed her - it wasn't her doing.

ASHLEY

When...when were you going to tell me? That you're leaving.

MARIO

We always walk to our cars together: then.

ASHLEY

Just hit it and run, huh?

MARIO

We can still hang out, Ashley; I'm not leaving town. In fact, not being co-workers might be the best thing for us.

ASHLEY

What do you mean?

MARIO

We can finally go out.

(Karen stands with her back to Ashley, slack-jawed, looking at Mario. Ashley squeals and rounds her sister to hug Mario. Mario gives an assuring look to Karen.)

ASHLEY

Really? Really?

MARIO

Yeah. Listen, I need to finish lunch. I'll see you at the end of the day. Just do me a favor: don't tell anyone I'm leaving yet. I don't need everyone's questions right now.

ASHLEY

Okay, okay.

(She gives him a peck on the lips.)

ASHLEY

See you later.

(Ashley bounds out the break-room.)

KAREN

(slumping into a chair)

That...was close. That was very quick thinking.

MARIO

(shrugs)

It is what it is. I need to go put in my resignation formally.

(He hovers behind her chair for a moment.)

MARIO

If I don't see you...so long.

(Mario exits. Karen sits in silence a moment. She starts clearing the trash on the table off into the garbage pail. The baby kicks again.)

KAREN

Ow! Hey, Olivia, take it easy with the gymnastics, all right? Yeah. I'm going to miss him too. It's for the best, I promise, okay? It's just you and me kid. It's just you and me.

(Karen cries quietly for a moment. The LIGHTS FADE to BLACK.)

SCENE 3

(The garbage pail is struck. A table cloth is set on the table and four sets of plates are placed at each chair (two on one side, one on either end). LIGHTS UP. Bill enters, setting silverware.)

BILL

(calling off-stage)

It'll be nice to finally meet this guy, he's all Ashley ever talks about. I hope he has the sense to not bring any wine, considering your condition.

KAREN

(from off-stage)

Remind me again why I agreed to this?

BILL

Because Ashley says he's a friend of yours whom you haven't seen since he quit a few months back. It'll be good for us to have some company for a change - you're becoming something of a hermit.

KAREN

(still off-stage)

You want to take a turn carrying the baby so I can go out?

BILL

I would if I could, sweetheart; you know I would.

(KAREN enters, carrying a salad bowl.
She is now eight months pregnant.)

KAREN

I know, Bill. I'm just afraid it'll get...couldn't we have gone out instead?

BILL

We need to save money, Karen, with the baby coming. Don't worry about the state of the house: it's immaculate. Besides, he's dating Ashley, he can't possibly be particular about cleanliness.

KAREN

That's my sister you're talking about!

BILL

It was a joke, Karen. A little levity, you know? After everything you say about her, anyway...

KAREN

She's my sister, I'm allowed to make cracks about her sleeping around. Besides, Mario's been very good for her, very grounding. I've never seen her so....

BILL

(beat)

Happy?

KAREN

Stable. Flightless. She's usually so listless, fluttering her attentions. It's like he's centered her.

BILL

Why do you sound so sad about it?

KAREN

(beat)

I just don't want her to get hurt.

(The doorbell rings.)

BILL

Well, it looks like it's my turn to size him up and see if he's any good for Ashley.

KAREN

Just...take it easy on him.

BILL

Hey, it's not like I'm Judge Dredd over here. This isn't The Inquisition...just a regular inquisition.

(He smirks and exits opposite Karen's entrance.)

KAREN

God. Please let him be over me. Please, oh please let him be over me.

BILL

(from off-stage)

Hey Ash. You must be Mario. I'm Bill.

MARIO

(also off-stage)

Got it right in one shot. Nice to meet you, Bill.

BILL

Won't you come inside?

(Enter ASHLEY and MARIO, followed by Bill. Mario carries a wooden box, as one might see an expensive bottle of wine in.)

BILL

Welcome to the abode, Mario. What have you got there? Should we get it chilling?

MARIO

Oh, no, it's not wine. Didn't think it'd be right to tempt your pregnant misses over there. It's gourmet honey.

BILL

Oh.

KAREN

Thank you Mario, that was very thoughtful.

(She sets the honey down on the table and gives Mario a curt but polite hug.)

ASHLEY

So enough with intro-and-re-introductions. Let's tuck in, I'm famished.

BILL

Right. Dinner should about done. Let me go get it. Everyone take a seat; Ash, you and Mario take the middle seats - Karen and I'll get the ends.

(Karen starts heading toward the kitchen.)

BILL

What're you doing, hon?

KAREN

I was going to help you bring dinner in.

BILL

Oh, don't worry, I got it. You just sit down and rest your feet. I've got it.

(He gives her a peck on the cheek and darts off to the kitchen, taking the honey with him. Karen shuffles dejectedly to her seat.)

ASHLEY

You okay, Karen?

KAREN

Yeah - I just don't want to feel like an invalid in my own house.

MARIO

You should rest as much as possible - you're pretty close to term, no?

KAREN

Yeah, I am, but I can still carry a roast from the oven to the dining room. It's not like I'm moving stuff around a warehouse.

ASHLEY

At least Bill's willing to help you. I have enough trouble trying to get Mario to take out the trash.

KAREN

(trying to reserve shock)

You guys are living together now?

ASHLEY

No. Oh, no. I mean his own trash. When I come over. I swear, sometimes I think there'd be nothing but trash in that apartment of yours, honey, if I wasn't around to keep it up for you.

MARIO

(off a glance at Karen)

Yeah. Probably.

BILL

(calling from off-stage)

Hey Ashley!

ASHLEY

Yeah?

BILL

You any good at cutting a roast? I'm kind of making a mess of this thing.

MARIO

(almost out his chair)

I can do it.

ASHLEY

Excuse me? Is your name Ashley?

KAREN

You're guests, I should do it.

ASHLEY

(hoping out her seat, pushing Karen back to hers)

Uh-uh. You neither. I'll be right back, okay? (calling off) Coming!

(Mario and Karen sit in silence a moment, staring at their plates.)

MARIO

You have a lovely home.

KAREN

Thanks. It's a mess.

MARIO

You kidding me? You heard Ashley, I practically live in garbage. This place is immaculate in comparison.

(The word "immaculate" hangs over their heads a second.)

MARIO

How's the baby?

KAREN

Tossing and turning. I think she's...it's ready to get out.

MARIO

You still don't know for certain, the gender?

KAREN

Nope. The suspense is killing me but I haven't buckled down and asked. I'll know soon enough. How're things with Ashley?

MARIO

All right. She treats me a little like a lost puppy.
(beat) She isn't you.

KAREN

Goddammit.

MARIO

What? You asked!

KAREN

(in hushed tones)

I was being polite! I thought you might be but was hoping you weren't fucking my sister in a desperate bid to be near me!

MARIO

Ashley has nothing to do with you!

KAREN

If she treats you like a pet why the hell are you still with her then?

MARIO

Because it's easy and it's better than being alone.

KAREN

You left work so that you could escape me and this baby, so it wouldn't hurt so much to see her...it...and then you get involved with my sister immediately thereafter? What the hell is going in your head, Mario?

MARIO

(tears are slowly welling in his eyes)
I don't know! I don't know, okay? I'm conflicted. I'm only human.

KAREN

You're malicious is what you are. You're going to break Ashley's heart with this.

MARIO

Thoughtless, maybe; not malicious. It has never been my intent to hurt Ashley!

BILL

(from off-stage)
Dinner's ready!

(Both Karen and Mario sit up in their seats; Mario wipes at his eyes. Bill enters carrying the roast, Ashley with the serving utensils.)

ASHLEY

And expertly sliced. Pot roast ain't got nothing on me.

(Bill sets the roast on the table. Karen stares at it a moment before a wave of nausea washes over her.)

KAREN

Excuse me.

(Karen races out the room covering her mouth.)

ASHLEY

(concerned)
I thought she'd be out of the morning sickness phase by now. Let me go look after her.

BILL

She usually likes to be left alone when she gets like this.

ASHLEY

Maybe by you. I'm her sister. I've held her back when she was puke drunk. Baby drunk ain't no thing.

(Ashley follows her out. Bill notices Mario's red eyes.)

BILL

You all right there, buddy?

MARIO

Yeah. Fine. Allergies.

BILL

Oh, believe me, I understand. I got into the doghouse a few months ago and went and got Karen some flowers? She nearly took my head off when I brought them into the house, saying I was purposefully trying to drive her into a sneezing fit. We've pretty much kept the house hypoallergenic since then though.

MARIO

Perhaps it's the absence of allergens that're setting me off.

BILL

(laughing)

Maybe. Maybe. Would you like a piece of meat? Some carrot and potato?

MARIO

Uhm...shouldn't we wait for Ashley and Karen to get back?

BILL

Oh, you want to give my wife your meat?

MARIO

What?

(The LIGHTS change ominously, everything but Mario and Bill get very dark very quickly.)

BILL

(rising from his chair and in anger, brandishing the roast utensils)

Yeah, you want to slip it into her, like you did eight months ago, don't you? I know you slept with my wife, you son-of-a-bitch, I know that's your baby swelling inside of her and so help me Olivia is going to live like goddamn Oliver if I have anything to say about it, which I do of course, because you're too chicken-shit to fight for your rightful responsibility! No, instead you slid into some pointless, meaningless relationship with her sister, pounding away at that twat while thinking of my wife. I'll kill you, you son-of-a-bitch! I'LL KILL YOU!

(Bill sits casually and puts a piece of meat on his plate. The LIGHTS return to normal.)

MARIO

Wh...what?

BILL

Oh, she's usually not very hungry after these episodes. Seems counterintuitive, I know, but what're you gonna do?

(He starts cutting into his meat.)

ASHLEY

(loudly, from off-stage)

WHAT?!

MARIO

Uh oh.

BILL

(turning in his chair, calling off-stage)
Everything all right in there?

(Ashley storms in.)

ASHLEY

(pacing at Mario)
You goddamn, lying son-of-a-bitch!

(Mario jumps from his chair.)

MARIO

What're you talking about...?

(Ashley slaps him.)

BILL

(jumping up too)
Whoa! Ashley! What the hell are you doing to your boyfriend?

ASHLEY

(breaking into tears)
This piece of shit isn't my boyfriend! Not anymore! Never really was, he was lying to me...lying...this whole time!

(Bill takes hold of her in his arms as Karen enters, holding her stomach; she's clearly been crying.)

ASHLEY

Oh. Oh, Bill, I'm so sorry. I'm so, so sorry for you.

BILL

For what?

ASHLEY

(to Karen)

You want to tell him or should I?

BILL

Tell me what?

Karen and Mario look at each other. Karen's eyes drop to the floor.

KAREN

It's Mario's baby.

Bill, looking confused, bounces looks between Mario and Karen.

BILL

Ech...excuse me?

KAREN

This baby. It's Mario's.

Bill lets go of Ashley.

KAREN

It...it wasn't an affair. It's just that you and I were having trouble conceiving and I wanted to give you a baby.

BILL

Did you in-vitro?

KAREN

(quietly)

No.

BILL

(getting into Karen's face)

Then how the fuck is it not an affair?!

KAREN

Because...because I didn't do it because I was in love with Mario, I did it so we could have our baby, like we wanted!

BILL

Like you!

KAREN

You didn't want a baby with me?

BILL

I don't know anymore. Maybe. I certainly don't want his fucking baby!

(Karen starts crying, then winces in pain. Her contractions start.)

KAREN

Uh! Uh! Oh my god. Oh no, not now.

BILL

What?

KAREN

I think I'm going into labor.

BILL

But you're still a month away!

KAREN

Yeah, this is unheard of, especially under stress.

MARIO

Oh my god! What should we do?

BILL

We? There's no we, asshole. It's my wife in labor here. I'm taking her to the hospital - you get the hell out of my house.

(Mario stands shocked for a moment.)

MARIO

Yeah but that's my....

KAREN

He said get out, get the fuck out!

MARIO

Hey, I have a right...

ASHLEY

(escorting Mario out and off)

They want you gone, Mario. Man up, shut up, and get the hell out of here!

ASHLEY

(from off-stage)

And don't fucking all me again!

The SOUND of a door slam reverberates loudly. Ashley re-enters.

ASHLEY

Where's your go-bag?

KAREN

By the garage. (to Bill) Are we okay?

BILL

Well, you're in labor.

KAREN

No, I mean us. Do you really not want this baby?

ASHLEY

We...uh...really don't have time for this right now.

KAREN

I'm not going anywhere until I get an answer.

BILL

(after an exhale)

Look, Karen, I'm mad. But now's not the time to go over this. I'm getting you to the hospital, and we'll talk when this is through. Okay? (off Karen's look, which is unbudging; with a look from Ashley too) I don't want to go anywhere, and it'll definitely take an adjustment, but I...I didn't mean what I said. I want this baby. It's part of you and I'll love it all the same.

KAREN

(crying)

You mean that?

BILL

I do.

(She hugs him. He hugs her back.)

ASHLEY

Come on guys, we gotta hurry.

KAREN

(breaking the hug, wiping away tears)
Of course. You have your cell phone, Bill?

BILL

(pulling it out his pocket, handing it
to Ashley)
Right here. Ash, call the hospital and tell them we're
on our way. Let's go run some red lights.

(They exit, the way of the entrance.
LIGHTS FADE on the empty stage. END.)