

# ACT ONE

## SCENE ONE

THE SETTING IS A LIVING ROOM OF A RANCH-STYLE COUNTRY HOUSE. THERE ARE TWO DOORS STAGE RIGHT — ONE FACING THE AUDIENCE, LEADING TO A KITCHEN; THE OTHER AT A RIGHT ANGLE ON THE WINGS, BEING THE MAIN ENTRANCE. STAGE LEFT IS THE ENTRANCE TO A HALLWAY. THERE IS A SOFA AGAINST THE WALL FACING THE AUDIENCE, A COFFEE TABLE IN FRONT OF THE SOFA. THERE IS A LARGE DESK NEXT TO THE HALLWAY ENTRANCE WITH A DESKTOP COMPUTER. NEXT TO THE SOFA IS A BOOKCASE FILLED WITH BOOKS.

THE DOOR TO THE KITCHEN OPENS AND CYNTHIA ENTERS CARRYING A BOTTLE OF CHAMPAGNE. SHE IS FOLLOWED BY MICHAEL, WHO IS TOTING TWO LARGE SUITCASES. SHE PUTS THE CHAMPAGNE BOTTLE ON THE COFFEE TABLE, WHILE MICHAEL PUTS THE SUITCASES ON THE FLOOR AND TAKES IN THE ROOM.

MICHAEL: So here I am at last.

CYNTHIA: What do you think?

MICHAEL: Nice. Cozy.

CYNTHIA: I like to think so.

MICHAEL: Of course I'm already familiar with things from the videos you sent me, so I feel at home already.

CYNTHIA: Good. As it should be. You're home now.

CYNTHIA POINTS TOWARDS THE HALLWAY.

CYNTHIA: Our bedroom's down there.

CYNTHIA GIGGLES GIRLISHLY AS SHE KISSES HIM ON THE CHEEK.

MICHAEL STARTS TO PICK UP THE SUITCASES.

CYNTHIA: No, leave them there for the moment while I get the champagne glasses.

CYNTHIA EXITS THROUGH THE KITCHEN DOOR.

MICHAEL COMES TO THE FRONT OF THE STAGE AND LOOKS OUT OVER THE AUDIENCE, AS IF LOOKING THROUGH A WINDOW.

CYNTHIA RETURNS WITH TWO GLASSES, PUTS THEM ON THE COFFEE TABLE, GOES TO STAND NEXT TO MICHAEL AND PUTS AN ARM AROUND HIM

MICHAEL: There are a lot of hills around. It reminds me of where I was brought up in England.

CYNTHIA: We're in the foothills of the Appalachians.

MICHAEL: The great Appalachians. I've heard so much about them.

MICHAEL POINTS OUT ACROSS THE AUDIENCE

MICHAEL: Whose house is that over there?

CYNTHIA: That's the house my dad grew up in.

MICHAEL: It looks in bad need of repair.

CYNTHIA: After he built this place he decided to let his old home die. It's still full of the stuff my grandparents had in the house when they died. It's a little creepy. I avoid going there.

CYNTHIA POINTS TO HER LEFT.

CYNTHIA: There's another house over there. There's a bit of the roof showing – see? Behind that big oak?

MICHAEL: Oh yes.

CYNTHIA: It used to be the home of my aunt. It's still full of her things. My dad decided to let that house die too, after she died. "Let the house die with her," he said. It's not in as bad a shape as my grandparents' house, but it's getting there.

MICHAEL: Have you ever thought of doing them up and selling them?

CYNTHIA: It would cost too much and I'd have to get planning permission. Too much trouble. I thought of having them demolished but that would also cost, so I've just left them. Besides, it was my father's wishes to let the houses die.

MICHAEL: Along with the contents?

CYNTHIA NODS. MICHAEL SHAKES HIS HEAD.

MICHAEL: I can't get over how isolated this place is.

CYNTHIA: A little different from England, eh?

MICHAEL: You can say that again. In England it's only the landed aristocracy who have estates anywhere near as large as this.

CYNTHIA: I'm as much of an aristocrat as anyone.

MICHAEL: Of course you are, my dear.

CYNTHIA: I'm your queen, remember.

MICHAEL: Of course you are.

CYNTHIA: But seriously, my folks have been in this county for untold generations, just like your British aristocrats. You might have noticed that the road outside is called Grampion Lane, named after my great grandfather. So what's the difference between your landed gentry and people who have owned land here since almost since the first European settlers?

MICHAEL: The only difference is the British aristos tend to have a royal pedigree.

CYNTHIA: But I'm royal, aren't I? You've already told me I'm your queen.

MICHAEL: You are indeed.

MICHAEL RETURNS HIS GAZE TO THE DISTANCE ABOVE THE AUDIENCE.

MICHAEL: How big is this property if you don't mind me asking?

CYNTHIA: Just over 270 acres.

MICHAEL: Wow. So who is your nearest neighbor?

CYNTHIA: That'd be old Jake Wilkinson. He lives up the hill, about two and a half miles that way.

CYNTHIA POINTS DIRECTLY AHEAD AND UPWARD.

CYNTHIA: You want to avoid going up there.

MICHAEL: Why's that?

CYNTHIA: They say he runs a still. He might shoot you if you happen to wander onto his property.

MICHAEL: A still? Really? Does that still happen?

CYNTHIA: This is real hillbilly country, honey. (SHE LAUGHS). Hadn't you realized? You've got yourself a real hillbilly chick.

MICHAEL: A hillbilly chick with three university degrees?

CYNTHIA: Probably the only one in the county. And all my learning is now at your disposal. I haven't told you yet, but I've given up my job at the school. I finish at the end of the week.

MICHAEL: Really? Why?

CYNTHIA: So I could spend more time with you.

MICHAEL: You did it for me?

MICHAEL FROWNS IN CONSTERNATION.

CYNTHIA: Don't look so worried. I'll give you plenty of room to work. It's not just sudden decision or only because of you. I've been thinking about it for some time now. I'm tired of trying to teach kids who'd much rather be out playing football or hang out with their friends than listen to me going on about English literature. Besides, I don't need the money. My parents left me enough to get by on. Not enough to live in luxury, but enough to allow me to pursue my own interests. Maybe I'll try to write a book, like you.

SHE KISSES HIM ON THE CHEEK, THEN RETURNS HER GAZE TO THE DISTANCE ACROSS THE AUDIENCE.

CYNTHIA: I just hope you don't find this place too remote and isolated.

MICHAEL: No, it's perfect. Exactly what I need – a place in the country, surrounded by nature's beauty, where I can finally concentrate on writing that novel I've always wanted to write, free of all distractions. All distractions but one, that is.

CYNTHIA: Why sir, what distractions could you be talking about?

MICHAEL TURNS TO HER, TAKES HER HANDS IN HIS.

MICHAEL: I think you know exactly what distractions I'm talking about.

CYNTHIA: You mean little old me? Why sir, you flatter me, I do declare. It's enough to make a young girl blush.

THEY KISS.

MICHAEL: So what is such a beautiful and educated gal doing with an over-the-hill Brit like me?

CYNTHIA: I love the accent. And you're not bad looking either.

MICHAEL: Thank you.

CYNTHIA: And I couldn't find anyone in this county with the kind of sophistication I was looking for.

MICHAEL: Do you have a thing for older men?

CYNTHIA: Not really. You think I'm looking for a father figure?

MICHAEL: I did wonder.

CYNTHIA: Leave the psychology to me, honey. I'm the psychology major, remember.

MICHAEL: So you are. But your original ad said you were looking for a mature and well-educated Englishman, preferably over 40 and anywhere up to 55. So that did suggest a preference for someone older.

CYNTHIA: It's a question of maturity rather than age. The two don't necessarily go together. Particularly in backward areas like this. Oh and that's another thing people from this area have in common with your British aristocracy.

MICHAEL: And what's that?

CYNTHIA: Interbreeding. Don't the British aristocracy tend to marry their cousins and try to keep everything within the family?

MICHAEL: I guess it used to be that way. But times are changing.

CYNTHIA: Not around here, they're not. It's still going on. Anyway, let's go sit down and celebrate your arrival with some champagne.

SHE LEADS HIM TO THE SOFA, HANDS HIM THE CHAMPAGNE BOTTLE.

CYNTHIA: Would you do the honors kind sir?

SHE SITS DOWN.

MICHAEL: It'd be my pleasure, Ma'am.

HE UNCORKS THE CHAMPAGNE, POURS TWO GLASSES, HANDS HER ONE, SITS DOWN NEXT TO HER AND RAISES HIS GLASS IN A TOAST.

MICHAEL: To us.

CYNTHIA: To us.

AFTER A SIP, CYNTHIA LOWERS HER GLASS AND BEGINS TO SNIFFLE. TEARS WELL IN HER EYES.

MICHAEL IS ALARMED.

MICHAEL: Good gracious Cynthia, what's the matter?

CYNTHIA: Don't mind me. I have a tendency to cry when I'm happy.

MICHAEL: Well, that's a relief. For a moment there I thought you'd suddenly realized that you'd made a terrible mistake.

CYNTHIA: Oh no. You're perfect.

SHE KISSES HIM.

CYNTHIA: I couldn't be happier.

SHE WIPES HER EYES.

MICHAEL: But does that mean if I keep you happy you're going to be crying a lot?

CYNTHIA: I'm afraid so. I'm a Pisces, remember. Pisces are known to cry a lot.

MICHAEL: Oh dear.

CYNTHIA: What?

MICHAEL: I never quite know what to do with a crying woman.

CYNTHIA: Does it embarrass you?

MICHAEL: A little.

CYNTHIA: (SOUNDING SLIGHTLY PEEVED). Well I'm sorry if it embarrasses you.

MICHAEL PUTS A HAND ON HERS.

MICHAEL: Look, it's no reflection on you, it's just that my mother used to cry a lot and I never knew what to do about it. I could never find the words to comfort her. She was very miserable with my father and there was nothing much I could do about it. It made me feel so helpless. The result is that a crying woman tends to makes me feel inadequate.

CYNTHIA: Okay, well I'll try not to cry then.

SHE STIFFENS HER BACK AND SITS UP STRAIGHT

MICHAEL: No, I don't want you to do that, not if it's your way of expressing happiness.

CYNTHIA: Okay. Thanks. (SHE SNIFFLES AGAIN). See, you're setting me off again.

MICHAEL PULLS HER HEAD TOWARDS HIM, KISSES HER ON THE FOREHEAD AND CRADLES HER HEAD TO HIS SHOULDER. HIS EXPRESSION, HOWEVER, IS ONE OF UNEASE AS HE LOOKS OVER THE TOP OF HER HEAD.

AFTER A FEW MOMENTS CYNTHIA LIFTS HER HEAD, SMILES, PICKS UP HER GLASS AND TAKES A SIP. MICHAEL DOES LIKEWISE.

MICHAEL POINTS TOWARDS THE COMPUTER DESK.

MICHAEL: So that's where you were sitting when we were messaging each other and Facetiming together.

CYNTHIA: Right. Isn't it amazing what can happen over the Internet?

MICHAEL: It certainly is. Without it, where would we be now? Both of us sitting alone in our homes thousands of miles and an ocean between us, neither of us aware of each other's existence. When you think about it, it's a miracle we ever met. It's only by the most remote chance that I stumbled upon your advertisement. I don't normally look at dating sites.

CYNTHIA: It was meant to be. Do you believe in fate?

MICHAEL: To some extent.

CYNTHIA: What does that mean?

MICHAEL: I mean, I think fate depends to a large extent on one's own actions and the effort one puts into the pursuit of personal goals. But I wouldn't disagree that we were destined to meet. I think the fact that we are here together now is proof enough of that.

CYNTHIA: I'll drink to that.

THEY CLINK GLASSES AND TAKE ANOTHER SIP OF THEIR DRINKS.

MICHAEL: Speaking of the Internet, I think I should send my daughter an email and let her know I've arrived safely. She always worries about me. (HE LOOKS AT HIS WRISTWATCH). It's midnight in England now, so it's too late to call. If

I send her an email now she'll see it first thing in the morning.

CYNTHIA: What's the rush?

MICHAEL: Well I just want to assure her that the plane didn't crash and that I haven't been murdered by some crazy Appalachian woman.

CYNTHIA'S FACE CLOUDS OVER.

CYNTHIA: Now what makes you want to say an ugly thing like that?

MICHAEL: Hey, I'm only joking.

CYNTHIA: Well, I'm sorry but it's not funny.

MICHAEL: No. Perhaps not. Oscar Wilde once said that the only thing that divided Americans from the English was language. But I think a sense of humor is another sticking point. Brits tend to be very dry in their sense of humor, whereas I think Americans tend to take things more literally. Anyway, I'm sorry. I'm sure you have no intention of murdering me. (REACTING TO HER STONY EXPRESSION:) Oops. I did it again. Sorry.

CYNTHIA: I guess your sense of humor is something I'll have to get used to.

MICHAEL: I hope so. At my age I'm a little set in my ways. I'm sure we both have adjustments to make now that we're living together. Anyway, do you mind if I email my daughter now and get it out of the way? That'll leave us free to concentrate on more – umm – intimate things.

CYNTHIA: No, go ahead. I'll turn on my computer.

MICHAEL: My laptop might be better. It has my email account on it. I left it in the car. Do you mind if I go and get it?

CYNTHIA: Well, if you want, but it'll be perfectly safe in the car. Nobody's going to steal it. Besides, you won't be able to email anyone on it from here.