

# **GRANDPA WAS A BACHELOR**

by  
Gene Fiskin

**ONE SET** – *(Minor decorating changes)*

**CAST:** *(In order of appearance)*

**Oliver Westhollow:** *60-70, a brilliant, sarcastic professor, forced to retire, who decides he would make some lucky family a superior surrogate grandfather, and places an ad to that effect.*

**ALICE MACY: 30-35,** *Oliver's assistant and housekeeper for the past year. Bright, irreverent and appealing.*

**DETECTIVE HOWSER: 35-50,** *a no-nonsense police officer, sent to check out Oliver.*

**JAMES MACY: 30-40,** *Alice's husband. An inordinately reasonable man. A psychologist by trade, but not above being manipulative.*

**MARGO ALTMAN: LATE 40's.** *She has answered Oliver's ad, called him, and tracked him to his home. Intelligent and tired. She is Kahlia's mother by adoption.*

**KAHLIA ALTMAN: 16,** *a bright high school student who has lost her parents, her adopted father and now must deal with Oliver as her would-be grandfather. She is the biggest surprise of his life.*

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## Grandpa Was A Bachelor

## ACT I

## SCENE 1

*(Lights up on a vintage New York upper-middle-class living room.)*

## TIME

The present.

*OLIVER WESTHOLLOW, an older man, stands poised before a large, unfinished abstract painting set on an easel. He holds a long artist's brush and studies the painting but doesn't do anything to it. On stage, a telephone on a small desk, rings. Oliver ignores it until the third ring. Annoyed, he picks up the phone.)*

## OLIVER

Hello. Yes. That's right I've advertised myself as a surrogate grandsire. "Grandsire." No, Miss, that's not a euphemism for sugardaddy. I'm offering to become someone's *grandfather*. And while your failing to understand that both appalls and excites me, my overriding reaction is one of fear for today's educational system.

*(beat)*

Oh, I see. And did you graduate or merely become pregnant?

*(beat)*

Yes, that could be interpreted as insulting. I'm so glad there is something you could properly understand, because to anyone with a modicum of intelligence, that newspaper ad is unqualifiedly clear. Hello? Hello? Twit.

*(He hangs up, sits at the desk, and reads from a New York Times classified section.)*

OLIVER *(continued)*

"For those interested, Grandsire available. Retiring college professor, gracious and caring, now interviewing qualified families, et cetra, et cetra."  
*(beat)* Maybe I should dumb it down. How about, 'Need grandpa? Let smart old guy do it.'"

*(He snorts derisively, then looks up thoughtfully. ALICE MACY enters. She is a young attractive woman.)*

## ALICE

Professor, I'm getting ready to leave. Is there anything else you need me to do?

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OLIVER

Not that I can think of. Oh. A question... If you wrote a classified ad, how revealing would you feel it had to be?

ALICE

What category?

OLIVER

I'd rather not say.

ALICE

Then I don't think I can answer.

OLIVER

Oh, all right! A *private* type of public announcement.

ALICE

A personal want ad?

OLIVER

More like an offering. With overtones of adoption.

ALICE

Well, sir, I wouldn't think it appropriate for you to adopt children. Or, for that matter, pets either. You barely take care of yourself, so I imagine anything you took in would be dead in a few days.

OLIVER

Which is why I have had you as an assistant, Alice.

ALICE

I don't get paid to care for anything you might be thinking of adopting. So, either tell me what you have in mind... or not.

OLIVER

If you laugh, your head goes on the end of a pike.

ALICE

Then I'll try to hold it to a girlish giggle.

OLIVER

I'm putting *myself* up for adoption.

ALICE

*(laughing hysterically)*

Oh, God...that's good.

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OLIVER

Why is there never a pike around when you need one?

ALICE

I'm sorry, Professor. That just took me by surprise.

OLIVER

It's not a joke. I'm offering myself to some deserving family.

ALICE

Please. I'm trying very hard to contain myself. You realize on campus you're known as a ... I don't quite know how to say it.

OLIVER

Tightass...?

ALICE

If one were to put it kindly.

OLIVER

So, revealing students burned my effigy isn't really an asset. . .

ALICE

Probably not. And I don't think their voodoo dolls would add much to the attraction, either.

OLIVER

How about "Unusual interest shown by students?" That could be viewed as a current approach to truth in advertising.

ALICE

What kind of adoption do you have in mind?

OLIVER

I'm pitching myself as a grandfather. A kindly, good natured, grandfather-type; astute, brilliant, and yet... still fond of children.

ALICE

Good luck putting that one over.

OLIVER

You don't think I'm good-natured? Well, I am!

ALICE

You've got points on intelligence . But the crowds are laughing at kindly and good natured.

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OLIVER

Let them laugh and be damned!

ALICE

*(thoughtful beat)*

I wouldn't think there was a big demand for grandfathers. Don't they tend to break? And smell?

OLIVER

That is offensive! I refuse to take it personally. My concern is only in creating a clear and factual impression so that people know exactly what they're getting with Oliver Westhollow.

ALICE

Maybe not such a good idea. Are you going to tell them you went through seven assistants in the last two years? And that I could only work with you when heavily medicated?

OLIVER

That is not true!

ALICE

Maybe not. But you did go through a lot of assistants.

OLIVER

They were totally incompetent, Alice. You were occasionally an improvement.

ALICE

Hearing those kind words how could anyone wonder why I've stayed with you?

OLIVER

People wonder?

ALICE

Only those who know you. But the truth is I have enjoyed your perverse sense of humor.

OLIVER

Not perverse. Satirical perhaps. Clever irony based on reality. Authenticity with a twist.

ALICE

And some might call it derisive, disdainful and sarcastic. However, I think it's simply wicked and contrary. But fun.

OLIVER

Which explains why I seldom looked to you for compliments.

## Grandpa Was A Bachelor

ALICE

Are you really going to offer yourself up as someone's grandfather?"

OLIVER

Already have. And had a response. Of sorts.

ALICE

Boggles the mind.

*SFX: the phone ringing again. Oliver answers it.*

OLIVER

Hello. Yes, this is he. Well, I don't actually have any of my own, but I've all the proper instincts. What are you looking for in a grandfather?

*(beat)*

I see. Well, madam, I would think the man you've described should have no less than a cathedral dedicated to him. I, alas, am merely kindly, thoughtful and good natured, but without a halo of my own. Still, I'm very fond of children and have eaten only a few. Thanks for calling.

*(He hangs up.)*

ALICE

Professor, I believe you're courting danger with this.

OLIVER

And what's wrong with me as a substitute grandfather? Look, I've been "urged" to retire. I'm all alone, I'd welcome having a family. It might even be fun.

ALICE

You can't expect strangers to just open their homes - and *hearts* to you. Especially to *you*. You are not what could be called "user friendly."

OLIVER

That's a lie! I am damned friendly! Besides, people like having strong personalities around.

ALICE

Not when those personalities are bossy and intolerant and don't hesitate to tell them how to run their lives.

OLIVER

You can't be talking about me! I offer my considerable insight only to those in need of it! The problem is sometimes they don't know they need it. However, as a grandfather I'd be outstanding!

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ALICE

You haven't the faintest idea how to behave as a grandfather. You're an old bachelor who's used to having his own way in everything.

OLIVER

I've not always been a bachelor, Alice. Everyone knows that before my Esther died, I was an attentive, loving husband.

ALICE

Sir, I heard you were always bad-tempered and demanding.

OLIVER

Esther loved that about me.

ALICE

I'm sure she loved you. Despite you being that way.

OLIVER

I've forgotten...who are you and what are you supposed to do around here? And why aren't you doing it?

ALICE

Well, you'll be free of me soon enough. I don't know, professor. If my husband ever showed signs of becoming like you his retirement would be a bullet. Sometimes you don't realize how nasty you can be.

OLIVER

I can also be gracious. And I think my becoming someone's grandfather is an astoundingly good idea. Besides, the idea of retirement bores the life out of me.

ALICE

That's selfish as hell. And what happens if it doesn't work out? Grandfathers don't just pack up and leave. And how do you think children will respond to a grouchy, pedantic stranger? One who doesn't like noise... or even modest expressions of joy.

OLIVER

They'll love me. I'm very loveable.

ALICE

And delusional.

OLIVER

*(long beat)*

Alice, you've worked with me for more than a year. Seriously, is this really such a bad idea?

## Grandpa Was A Bachelor

ALICE

I think it could be a threat to national security.

OLIVER

I should just stay here and grow old quietly?

ALICE

Yes. No. I mean... The truth is, I'm not sure other people... normal people, could put up with you. C'mon, how many self-centered, caustic, elderly men would even consider passing themselves off as *hired* grandfathers?

OLIVER

So, there it is, then! In your estimation I am finally not only scornful, but completely and utterly useless. Just a hairy bump in space!

ALICE

I didn't say you were useless. And certainly never felt you were. But I do like that, "hairy bump" thing.

*(SFX: Phone ringing. Alice answers it.)*

ALICE

Hello. Yes, I guess he's the one. No, thank God, I'm not related. He's right here. Hold on.

*(She hands the phone to Oliver.)*

OLIVER

Hello. This is Oliver Westhollow. Well, naturally you have some questions, I wouldn't presume otherwise.

*(beat)*

Of course I'm open to meeting with you. When would be convenient. Now? You're where? Outside my door? How in the world did you get my address?

*(beat)*

Oh, dear God, what have I done? All right.

*(He hangs up).*

OLIVER (continued)

Alice, would you please let Detective Howser in.

*(Alice exits, Oliver makes sure he is presentable. Alice returns followed by Detective Howser, a steely-eyed, no nonsense type. The two men eye each other. Howser flashes a badge.)*

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

HOWSER

Mr. Westhollow, I'm Detective Ralph Howser, NYPD.

OLIVER

Have I done something illegal?

HOWSER

I don't know. Have you?

OLIVER

Alice, have I?

ALICE

To my knowledge a lack of common sense isn't illegal.

OLIVER

There you are, a ringing endorsement of my personal integrity.

HOWSER

Yeah, that's great. Mr. Westhollow, my Lieutenant asked me to drop in on you.

OLIVER

What have I done?

HOWSER

Apparently you placed some kind of personal ad in the New York Times. Is that right?

ALICE

I knew you'd get in trouble. I just never thought the law would be involved.

OLIVER

Alice, could I have a moment alone with Detective Howser?

*(She nods and leaves.)*

OLIVER (continued )

I simply advertised myself as a substitute grandfather. I mean, is that against the law?

HOWSER

Depends. Are you a grandfather?

OLIVER

Not literally. But I could be one.

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HOWSER

So you admit to certain misrepresentations.

OLIVER

No! No. Well.. when you put it that way. But is it so different from – for instance - an adopted child calling their new parent “mom?”

HOWSER

Depends on the sex of the parent.

OLIVER

Detective, why precisely are you here?

HOWSER

I told you. A higher up asked me to check you out.

OLIVER

And why would he do that?

HOWSER

Apparently your ad triggered some kind of curiosity.

OLIVER

Curiosity. As in “This could be interesting?” Or, “Let’s find out what this sideshow is up to before calling in the FBI.”

HOWSER

My Lieutenant... Lieutenant Alphonse Tonini, grew up without parents. His new wife recently lost her father, so now she’s an orphan, too. She brings two little kids to the marriage. Lieutenant Tonini seems to think a grandfather might come in handy.

OLIVER

I’m not applying for a job!

HOWSER

Really? Did you, or did you not advertise yourself as a potential grandfather?

OLIVER

That was my intent, yes.

HOWSER

So you were applying for the position of “grandfather.” Isn’t that right?

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OLIVER

I was offering to serve as a substitute for one. In no way was I seeking an employer!

HOWSER

Let me see if I got this straight. You were planning on putting in time with some completely unrelated people. Right?

OLIVER

Yes...

HOWSER

Maybe eat their food... use their premises. If the conditions were right, they could maybe be looking at some kind of drain on their utilities or something. Is that correct?

OLIVER

I suppose that might have been possible....

HOWSER

So, one way or another it's gonna *cost* these complete strangers to keep you busy. There's probably going to be some kind of expenses in exchange for you being there performing these alleged "grandfather" duties. Am I close?

OLIVER

Well...I mean...I suppose that's a ....

HOWSER

So you were looking for work. You think being a grandfather isn't a job? I'm beginning to think you don't know squat about what's involved. You got kids?

OLIVER

No. But I'm a college professor. I teach them. Or, rather, I've taught them for ... well, a long time.

HOWSER

Not the same, pal. Grandpas gotta know how to work with kids. Kids are crazy, ya'know. I got three. All wacko.

OLIVER

I assure you, I function perfectly with young people.

HOWSER

I'm not talkin' young people. I'm talkin' kids! Kids'll suck your brains out. They'll work you over like a Central Park mugger. And then they'll want a toy. You got toys?

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OLIVER

No, I don't believe I do. But that's something that could be quickly rectified.

HOWSER

Yeah? What kinda toys you gonna give a three-year-old?

OLIVER

I don't know.

HOWSER

My Pretty Pony ain't gonna do it, y'know. Not today! And what about the five-year-old? Ya gonna give him a tank, or just a handgun? Or are you thinkin' you can sucker him out with a few crayons?

OLIVER

Would a bazooka be too showy?

HOWSER

Man...you are a dud.

OLIVER

Very likely.

*(beat)*

So, you're here to check me out as a prospective grandparent for your Lieutenant Tonini. Correct?

HOWSER

That's the drift.

OLIVER

And, I gather, you don't seem to think I qualify.

HOWSER

I'm not saying you couldn't learn to do it. But I'm thinking you'd go through hell first.

OLIVER

And wouldn't that be *my* problem?

HOWSER

Yeah. But that might not be so great for the Lieutenant's new kids. And that means I'm gonna have an unhappy Lieutenant. And that means he's gonna be an all around pain-in-the-ass. So I hope you understand why you're not getting a rave review from me.

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OLIVER

Detective, though I think your conclusions are totally erroneous and misplaced... and in virtually every aspect disagree with you entirely... You have raised some interesting points. Please give my best to Lt. Tonini, and my sympathies to his new wife.

*(Howser nods and turns to leave. He looks back at Oliver.)*

HOWSER

I'm glad you see what I'm talkin' about, professor. Looks like you got a decent enough life here. Maybe you ought to just leave things the way they are.

*(He leaves. Alice pops back in.)*

ALICE

Wow. Not your basic master of subtlety, is he. Worked you over pretty good.

OLIVER

I am bruised, but no bones broken.

ALICE

Still think you'd be right for some loving family?

OLIVER

Possibly. I'm kindly. Devoted. There's no reason why I wouldn't shine as somebody's grandfather.

ALICE

Do me a personal favor? Talk to my husband. James is a psychologist, see what he thinks. He's a good guy and he's got a lot of common sense. He'll be objective and he won't steer you wrong.

OLIVER

I don't need a psychologist.

ALICE

I'm not too sure about that.

OLIVER

Why is this so hard to accept? Surely some family out there would welcome having a brilliant ex-professor around. An active, intelligent one who doesn't need help finding his way home.

ALICE

Talk to James.

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

I don't need a psychologist.

OLIVER

Talk to James!

ALICE

No.

OLIVER

PROFESSOR....! TALK TO JAMES!

ALICE

ALL RIGHT! *(beat)* But under duress.

OLIVER

*BLACKOUT*

ACT I

SCENE 2: Two weeks later.

*When the lights come back on, Oliver stands looking sourly at the large painting on stage. He is obviously unhappy. JAMES MACY sits nearby. He is in every respect, a reasonable man.*

JAMES

You realize, it would be a complete life change for you, Professor. Is that what you want?

OLIVER

Why not? Now that I'm retired what else have I got?

JAMES

You could take pleasure in your free time. I mean, you've a nice home, no responsibilities. Why not enjoy yourself?

OLIVER

Having nothing to do is not my idea of fun. I prefer having a reason for getting up in the morning.

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

JAMES

What about hobbies? I see you paint. You could start writing perhaps. Or, collecting things... travel... take up golf.

OLIVER

Please. What I'd like to collect is appreciation as a valuable human being. Now I won't even have my students. Not that I think they fully appreciated my efforts... but that's another story. I'm without siblings, parents, a wife or a job. If I disappeared tomorrow, who would care?

JAMES

I think Alice would.

OLIVER

She might. She's odd enough. Your Alice gives me a hard time, but I know she does it out of caring. Some would find that forgivable.

JAMES

She talks about you a lot. You, our kids, and the University... that's her whole life. And me, I guess.

OLIVER

The boys are how old now?

JAMES

Five and seven. Good boys.

OLIVER

You see, you've got a fine, exciting future ahead of you. I'm dealing with a blank wall. Do you know what the Golden Years really are? A dead end. And then you're dead. All my education, what good is it?

JAMES

What about teaching classes for seniors?

OLIVER

Talk about a waste of time! Except for personal satisfaction, in almost all respects, continuing education is really pointless for seniors. They are given little or no chance to use it. Let's say I taught them everything I know about English Literature. Now there are even more tottering old farts loaded up with knowledge they can't use.

JAMES

And to you grandfathering is a better way to spend your time? Even though it means turning your back on education, something you've done all your life?

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

OLIVER

Why not? New tastes, new flavors.

JAMES

Okay. Let's examine the conditions. Suppose someone is actually willing to take you in as a grandfather. Can you handle children?

OLIVER

Well, I see no problem as long as they're civil and respectful.

JAMES

You're kidding, right?

OLIVER

I couldn't be more serious.

JAMES

Professor, children aren't respectful. They are selfish, self-centered, and self-absorbed. They want what they want and think you are a massive poop if you don't give it to them.

OLIVER

They are also loving little sponges eager to learn about everything.

JAMES

Which is why we don't kill them when they're two years old.

OLIVER

Why does everyone think I can't handle this? Millions of people do it every day. Am I so different?

JAMES

Can we examine that question without you going ballistic?

OLIVER

I don't know. Depends on how close you get.

JAMES

Let's start with experience. Assuming you get along perfectly with their parents - a mighty big assumption incidentally - why would you want to spend time around children?

OLIVER

What kind of question is that?

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JAMES

A reasonable one. Maybe you're a pervert. Are you?

OLIVER

Of course not! I love kids. They make me smile. I don't know why, they just tickle the shit out me.

JAMES

Why do you suppose that is?

OLIVER

There's something so damned charming about them. They're like puppies. Who doesn't love puppies? James...may I call you James? There have been no children in my life. College students, yes. But no little ones. I have always missed that. To be important to an emerging personality...maybe even loved by that creature. Do you have any idea how precious that is?

JAMES

My boys remind me every day. But there's also the simple logistics of caring for them. Physically, it can be quite demanding.

OLIVER

Nonsense.

JAMES

Professor, Alice tells me you don't move around so well anymore, and a couple of surgeries have taken their toll.

OLIVER

Alice is a blabbermouth.

JAMES

Possibly. But beyond all that, you've lived alone for a long time and you're not used to having to accommodate anybody else.

OLIVER

Not so. For the past year I've accommodated your wife several days a week. And sometimes she has a most irritating manner.

JAMES

Well, I can't argue with that. However, that's not really relevant. Because except for Alice and your time on campus, you've lived in your own little insulated world where things were always the way you wanted them. That goes out the window when you're part of a family. There's lots of give and take. And senior members generally do a lot more giving than taking.

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

OLIVER

I am the soul of generosity. Ask Alice.

JAMES

No one is challenging that. I expect you're a good man, Professor. And I understand you were an excellent... if abrasive, teacher. A thankless job, probably wonderfully performed. But please grant that all that is in the past.

OLIVER

But I still have life in me. And just possibly a trace of caring. Along with nearly seven decades of knowledge and experience. Is that meaningless?

JAMES

No. Of course not.

OLIVER

We spend our whole lives learning, and after countless decades... when we finally know something...you're telling me nobody wants it.

JAMES

Impressive, if not ballistic. So why is it, I find myself questioning what you are saying? What is it, you're not telling me?

OLIVER

I'm hurt! Really hurt that you don't believe me!

JAMES

Oh, I believe you, Professor. I just think you're holding out on me. There's something else. Something that leads me to question why a man who's only lived for himself for so long, is suddenly interested in sharing his life? And I'm waiting to hear what that is.

OLIVER

Hmmm. Suppose I said I finally realized I was facing my own mortality?

JAMES

Then, I guess I'd say, "bullshit." A man like you would have dealt with that long ago.

OLIVER

I'm not paying for this consultation am I?

JAMES

Would you like to?

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

OLIVER

No. But if I were, I'd object to your attitude.

JAMES

Since Alice has declared this session pro bono... tough!

OLIVER

Damn! I hate not having leverage. All right, what is it you think you know that I don't?

JAMES

Oh, we both know what it is. You just don't want to admit it. That would be a sign of weakness. But you have to say it. The actual words.

OLIVER

You're something of a bastard, aren't you.

JAMES

Those aren't the words I had in mind. But you know what they are. Say them! Good ahead...spit it out!

OLIVER

I don't know what you want me to say!

JAMES

Why is this so difficult for you?

OLIVER

Because I think you're trying to put words in my mouth.

JAMES

Which words?

OLIVER

You know damned well which words.

JAMES

Then say them.

OLIVER

ALL RIGHT!! If it is so damned important to you.

(beat)

I have been ...I am...Damn, why is this so hard?

JAMES

Raw truth. It's bumpy. C'mon, Professor. Say it.

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OLIVER

My God, you're relentless!

*(beat)*

All right. For some time now, I have been really...genuinely... *lonely*. And I find that very painful.

JAMES

See...that wasn't so bad, was it?

OLIVER

YES IT WAS!

JAMES

A good first step, Professor. Labored, perhaps, but it's important to recognize *why* one does what one does.

OLIVER

And you thought I didn't know?

JAMES

Sometimes saying it out loud makes it more real.

OLIVER

I assure you, what I feel is quite real enough. I didn't have to *announce* it to appreciate its authenticity!

JAMES

Perhaps not. But until you could humble yourself like that I didn't feel I had earned my fee.

OLIVER

*(laughs)*

By God, you are a bastard. I like that in a man!

JAMES

Coming from an original, a real compliment.

*Both men laugh, and for the first time really relax with each other.*

OLIVER

I must confess I love your wife.

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JAMES

Me too.

OLIVER

Okay. So, what's your diagnosis?

JAMES

Well, there are no easy answers. Retirement is traumatic for some people. You seem to have considerable angst in that area. That sense of no longer being useful. Or important. Those feelings can impact self-value heavily.

OLIVER

My self-value is completely intact.

JAMES

Maybe. And, while there still may be something else lurking underneath there, loneliness... deep, stark loneliness... can be very hard.

*(beat)*

So, perhaps you've hit on an answer. Okay. Let's say somebody actually takes you up on your proposal. How do you work out the logistics?

OLIVER

Well, if they want me to, I'd move in with them.

JAMES

And what about this place?

OLIVER

Sell it. Rent it. That would give me plenty of money to pay my own way. I don't have to be a burden.

JAMES

You've lived here what...30 years? What about your memories? You and your wife ... right here, growing old together?

OLIVER

James, this house is just so many sticks and stones. The memories are all in here.

*(pointing to his head)*

Look around, you don't see Esther. I've got her locked up inside me. She goes where I go. And right now, we're going to go pee.

*(Oliver exits and Alice enters.  
She goes to James.)*

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

ALICE

Well, did you set him straight?

JAMES

I don't think so. He's a self-centered, naïve. . . lonely old man. Unless he can change it, he sees his future as a boring dead end. He wants a new life. I think maybe he's entitled.

ALICE

Realistically, I don't see that happening.

JAMES

Well, that's not entirely beyond the realm of possibility. In fact, it could.... Well, what I mean is... if you look at it objectively there are even some quite immediate possibilities.

ALICE

What are you talking about? Where's he going to find some weird family to take him in? And what if they can't stand him? It'd break his heart.

JAMES

That's true. So, what are you suggesting? That, that could be avoided if... if he came with us?

ALICE

What are you talking about???

JAMES

Perhaps you were just speculating. But, what I think you were getting at was...if we...and I'm just trying to verbalize your suggestion out loud at the moment...that perhaps you and I could kind of take him in ...give him the opportunity to act as grandfather to our kids.

ALICE

Are you crazy...????

JAMES

It's not a bad idea. He has valuable experience and knowledge....

ALICE

...And craziness!

JAMES

He's not crazy. He's lonely. That makes people... behave badly sometimes.

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

ALICE

Oliver Westhollow? Grandpa???

JAMES

Now that you've suggested it, I suppose it could work. We've got the room.

ALICE

I didn't suggest that! And what in hell would we do with him, anyway?

JAMES

My guess is we'd give him a family. And enhance ours.

ALICE

James, that old man drives me nutty most of the week. I know it ends soon, but you'd have me give up a part time job that actually pays some money, in order to deal with the same thing... full time... for nothing?

JAMES

That part's also true. On the other hand, he *could* be a real help.

ALICE

Not around the house, he wouldn't be.

JAMES

Maybe not. But educationally, he'd be a real asset to the boys. And to us, logistically. He's a smart man, Alice. And beneath all his bullshit he's not a bad guy.

ALICE

Where would he sleep? All the bedrooms are full.

JAMES

He could have the fourth bedroom.

ALICE

That's my sewing room!!!

JAMES

When was the last time you did any sewing? Alice, neither of us has parents or other family to speak of. The boys have got no one but us. It might be good for them.

ALICE

I don't see how. He can be an ogre at times.

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

JAMES

Well, he's not entirely alone in that, is he? But that aside, you and I could use some getaway time. Maybe even take a vacation together. Alone.

*(She sinks onto the sofa and holds her head.)*

ALICE

Ohh...I don't know, James...

*(Oliver returns holding a letter, sees Alice.)*

OLIVER

Oh, good. Now you can both lecture me.

JAMES

Oliver, we've been talking ...

ALICE

Oh, God, James. Oh, God, don't do it...

OLIVER

There's nothing to talk about. If some legitimate family actually responds, I'll think about it and make a decision then.

JAMES

What do you consider a legitimate family?

OLIVER

I don't know. A mother, father, a child or two. People who recognize what assets a grandparent brings to a family.

JAMES

*We're* a legitimate family.

OLIVER

Indeed you are. I'm so pleased for you.

*(looking at the letter)*

Alice, was Margo Altman a student of mine?

ALICE

I don't know. I'd have to check with the registrar.

*(Oliver, opening the envelope.)*

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

OLIVER

Why do students feel they have to write to me? Why can't they just perfect their spells and incantations? Don't you just hate "hate" mail?

*(He begins reading the letter.)*

*SLOW FADE TO BLACK*

ACT I

SCENE 3

*(Lights up on Oliver, once more starring at his painting.. The doorbell RINGS. Oliver crosses the stage and goes OS to the front door. When he returns he is accompanied by a woman who is probably in her late 40s.)*

OLIVER

Mrs. Altman, I read your letter and since you made it very clear you intended to see me...whether I liked it or not... I felt the least I could do was be here to shatter your illusions. That said, just how in blazes were you able to find me?

MARGO

A friend of mine works in classifieds. She gave me your home address.

OLIVER

It would seem there are no secrets sacred to the New York Times.

MARGO

My fault.

OLIVER

No doubt. So, Mrs. Altman, through devious and questionable means, you have ferreted me out. Are you disappointed? Were you perhaps expecting someone more grandfatherly?

MARGO

I don't know that I was expecting anything, Mr. Westhollow. After my phone conversation with you, I very nearly passed on the subject.

OLIVER

I have no recollection whatever of talking to you.

## Grandpa Was A Bachelor

MARGO

A couple of weeks ago. Before I sent the letter. You said what I really wanted was a saint. With his own cathedral. And that children were occasionally on your menu.

OLIVER

That was you...?

MARGO

Yes, indeed. But after I hung up I started to laugh. That's the only reason I'm here now.

OLIVER

I'm aghast at your permissiveness.

MARGO

I've now decided that when it comes to potential grandfathers one must be open minded... and not too selective.

OLIVER

Well, that's refreshingly frank. Not as flattering as you might think. Still, it has a certain irksome charm. Since you seem so determined, what's the next step?

MARGO

I don't know if there *is* a next step. But when Stewart and I adopted Kahlia, we thought that step made us the luckiest people on earth. And it did.

OLIVER

And what do the luckiest people on earth want now?

MARGO

I would have thought that was clear. A father figure.

OLIVER

And what's wrong with your Stewart?

MARGO

Absolutely nothing. But he died. A little over a year now. Kahlia and I have been trying to make a life without him. It's been very hard. And I'm a little scared.

OLIVER

Do you work?

## Grandpa Was A Bachelor

MARGO

I'm a freelance art director for a small ad agency. That let's me work from my apartment.

OLIVER

What about the child?

MARGO

Well, she's quite independent. I've almost reached the point where I don't worry about her when I have to go into the City. Besides, Stewart's mom has been fairly close. They're crazy about each other. I'm lucky in that regard.

OLIVER

I'm wondering if it's a mistake, you being here, Mrs. Altman. I thought this grandfather thing would work out. I'm not so sure anymore.

MARGO

Oh, you've changed your mind?

OLIVER

No. I still think I would be a superb grandfather. But so far the offerings have been slim and not up to my expectations. I'm beginning to think I may have made a mistake. Something, I assure you, that doesn't come readily to mind.

MARGO

Mr. Westhollow, if you have reservations, you shouldn't take on anything as involving as being a grandfather.

OLIVER

Oh, I think I could handle it.

MARGO

Possibly. But it would be a major commitment. Botched, it'd be devastating for everyone. If you have doubts, clearly you aren't up to it. You're right to question your suitability.

OLIVER

I have never botched anything in my entire life! If I were someone's grandfather, they would cherish my memory for all time. I'm a catch, lady! A bloody good catch!

MARGO

Your ad made me wonder what kind of man you were. I finally realized the writer ...though a bit supercilious...was someone who wanted a family and was after something more important than himself.

(beat)

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

MARGO (continued)

After meeting you, that's a little hard to believe. But it still might be true. Deep down, that ad cried out for something. That's why I had to see you.

OLIVER

Based on your paperback psychology, Mrs. Altman, and after deceitfully running me to earth, what do you think you've found?

MARGO

A man who's attitude has probably always made him a pain in the ass.

OLIVER

I was hoping to hear something a bit less obvious.

MARGO

But then I thought, why would he advertise as a would-be grandfather unless there was some real grandfather in him? My little girl doesn't have a father any more. And I'm not interested in dragging one in just to fill a vacancy. A caring, loving grandfather would be perfect. I think, with a little work, you might do.

OLIVER

Do you, now? How flattering. And what kind of lavish quarters await this refined and improved grandfather?

MARGO

I have a small two bedroom apartment in Queens. You could have the master bedroom and I'd move in with Kahlia. It could work. Depends on how badly you want to be a grandfather.

OLIVER (*with sarcasm*)

Sounds marvelous....

*The front doorbell RINGS and Oliver bellows:*

COME IN.....

*(James and Alice enter. Oliver acknowledges them and makes introductions.)*

Mrs. Altman, this is Alice and James Macy. They're friends of mine. Margo Altman. I believe she is propositioning me.

ALICE

The Margo Altman you thought was a student?

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

OLIVER

The very same. And surprisingly, her letter wasn't hate mail. Isn't that nice?

ALICE

Well, clearly she hadn't met you.

OLIVER

No. But she has now. And unless I'm mistaken Mrs. Altman has invited me to become her child's grandfather. I just might.

JAMES

That's really interesting, Professor. We've been entertaining a similar idea.

OLIVER

What are you talking about?

JAMES

Alice and me. Ricky and David, our two boys. *We're* a family.

OLIVER

Of course, you are. So what? James, what in hell are you getting at?

JAMES

We were thinking a grandfather would be a delightful addition to our family. How would you feel about coming to live with us? As Grandpa.

OLIVER

Are you out of your mind?

ALICE

That's what I said!

JAMES

We mean it, Professor. Think about it.

OLIVER

By God, I'm in demand! Old farts rule!

ALICE

Don't make any snap decisions. Take your time.

OLIVER

I don't know what to say. I mean, I'm touched. Really. I'm very nearly speechless.

## Grandpa Was A Bachelor

JAMES

It could work, Professor. And we think it might be a good thing. I know it's sudden but we'd like you to consider it.

OLIVER

Alice...are you certain this is something you'd want to do? You had such intense reservations about my grandfathering abilities.

ALICE

Admittedly, my first response was nausea. But after a few drinks I could see what James was thinking. It might actually work. If all the ground rules are understood and respected.

OLIVER

What are they?

ALICE

I don't know. We haven't made them up yet.

OLIVER

I see. They'll come, no doubt, as the result of hideous experiences.

MARGO

Not to put too fine a point on it, but have I just been shut out?

JAMES

I'm sorry. We didn't know about you, Mrs. Altman

OLIVER

James...Alice. You've blindsided me and my mind has literally shut down. Could I think about this and get back to you?

JAMES

That's okay. You don't have to answer right now. First make sure this is something you really want to do. It'll be a big change. For everybody. Certain sacrifices will have to be made.

OLIVER

(thoughtfully)

Too true, James. Too true.

JAMES

C'mon, Alice. Let's give the Professor time to think.

*(She nods and goes to James.)*

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

ALICE

You're a good person, James Macy. I love you a lot.

JAMES

Yeah. Well, sometimes I really wonder about me.

OLIVER

James...? This could in fact be really stupid, couldn't it.

JAMES

Yeah. But I don't think so.

*(James and Alice exit leaving Oliver and Margo staring at one another. )*

MARGO

Well, that was fun. I suppose I should go now.

OLIVER

Not just yet. Do you think they were sincere?

MARGO

It certainly appeared so.

OLIVER

He's a psychologist. She was my assistant. They have two boys.

MARGO

Sounds perfect.

OLIVER

It is. And they are lovely people.

MARGO

Yes. I thought so, too.

OLIVER

But I'm concerned their offering might be based more on compassion. Sympathy for me. Possibly pity. I'd prefer to be of value to someone.

(beat)

So my question to you is, how big is that master bedroom?

MARGO

Not very. And, after seeing your home I'm afraid you'd be disappointed. I'm sorry I wasted your time.

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

OLIVER

Could I redecorate, hang the family crest and armorial insignia?

MARGO

You're a strange old man, aren't you.

OLIVER

Sadly, you are not the first to point that out.

MARGO

Mr. Westhollow, I think you'd be a caring, if peculiar grandfather. I'd be tickled if you took us on.

OLIVER

First, the child and I will have to look each other over. Two falls out of three should do it. Then we can work on logistics.

MARGO

Great!

OLIVER

But for the record, if we do this...I think I would want the two of you to move in here. There's lots of room, and plenty of places to play and hide. You'll have to teach me how to do the right things, though. But I'm a quick study. Think about it.

MARGO

You'd want us to live here with you?

OLIVER

It's too good a house to give to strangers. I'd like to keep it in the family.

MARGO

Then I suppose it would be a good idea for you to meet Kahlia. I'll bring her in.

OLIVER

You left her outside? What kind of mother are you!!!

MARGO

I assure you, she's perfectly all right.

OLIVER

Mrs. Altman, I'm appalled at your callousness! Please, bring the child in immediately! I'll get her some cookies.

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

*(Margo exits through the front door, while Oliver runs into the kitchen, returning almost immediately with a box of cookies. He stands center stage his back to the front door, struggling to open the cookies. In a moment Margo and KAHLIA enter. Kahlia is about 16, but looks very grown up. Oliver turns to them when they enter.)*

MARGO

Professor Westhollow, this is Kahlia.

OLIVER

Dear God!!!

*GO TO BLACK*

ACT II

SCENE 1 - A moment later.

*(The three of them stand as they were at the end of Act I.)*

OLIVER

I'm sorry. I was expecting someone....shorter.

KAHLIA

What? I don't understand.

OLIVER

I thought you were a little girl.

MARGO

Didn't I mention Kahlia was in high school?

OLIVER

No, my dear, you did not!

## Grandpa Was A Bachelor

KAHLIA

Mom....!!!

MARGO

I thought I had. Besides, I didn't know it mattered. You said you wanted to be a grandfather.

KAHLIA

Look at him. He's in shock.

OLIVER

Just a little surprised, that's all. You're so...so tall.

KAHLIA

Not for my age.

OLIVER

And that's the spine of my problem. I was expecting a little girl. You know.... *little*.

KAHLIA

Mom...? What are we doing here?

MARGO

I'm beginning to wonder myself.

OLIVER

Mrs. Altman, you lead me to believe Kahlia was a child....

MARGO

She is. She's my child.

OLIVER

You know what I mean. But she's practically a grown woman. How am I supposed to grandfather a grown woman?

MARGO

Do you have any idea what a "grandfather" is?

OLIVER

Might it be an older gentleman bouncing a toddler on one's knee? Toddler. Now, does that descriptive noun mean anything to you?

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

MARGO

Professor, are you saying you can't be a grandfather to anything except a small child?

OLIVER

I haven't said that...

MARGO

You're acting like that's how you feel.

OLIVER

Mrs. Altman...

MARGO

Margo...

OLIVER

Margo. I'm just surprised, that's all. Give me time to adjust. I was thinking you had a small child. A little kid. Kahlia is virtually a woman. I just have to ...adjust.

MARGO

She's not a woman! She's not even 17 yet!

KAHLIA

Biologically, I'm a woman. Only to you am I still a child.

MARGO

You'll be a woman when I say you're a woman!

KAHLIA

Mom...I'm more than old enough to have sex! And lots of girls in my class already have.

MARGO

That will take place over my dead and bleeding body!

KAHLIA

Dead bodies don't bleed once the heart stops.

MARGO

Oh, you're such a damned smartass!

KAHLIA

And you've become a hypocritical old maid!

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

Now, now ladies. Let's not get bitchy.

OLIVER

*(together, at Oliver)*

MARGO  
You stay out of this!

KAHLIA  
Don't you call my mother bitchy!

Dear God...!

OLIVER

MARGO  
Professor, I'm sorry. Apparently you think I mislead you. That was never my intention.

MARGO

OLIVER  
Mrs....Margo. I had a very different impression, that's all. Kahlia is lovely. She's just not a little girl.

OLIVER

MARGO  
And does that disqualify her as a grandchild?

MARGO

KAHLIA  
You don't want to be my grandfather, do you.

KAHLIA

OLIVER  
I haven't said that. I'm merely dealing with surprise, that's all. And it seems I've not handled it very well.

OLIVER

KAHLIA  
You don't have to be my grandfather! I've done without one so far. I can live without you in my life.

KAHLIA

MARGO  
Kahlia!

MARGO

KAHLIA  
I don't want him. Let's just go home.

KAHLIA

MARGO  
Kahlia. Whether or not we become a family remains to be seen. But we should at least give it a chance.

MARGO

*(beat)*  
Well, Professor?

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

OLIVER

I suppose that would be fair.

KAHLIA

Why? It's pretty clear I'm not what he wants. We can get along without an old man around.

OLIVER

Hey! I'm not that old!

*(beat)*

Well, I am. But it's rude to call an old man, "old" to his face.

KAHLIA *(after a beat)*

I'm sorry. You're right. I *was* rude. I apologize.

OLIVER

Accepted.

MARGO

Well. This hasn't been the best first step, has it?

OLIVER

Oh, I don't know. I've had worse just being greeted by colleagues.

MARGO

All right. What do we do now?

OLIVER

Get to know each other, I would think. Find out what it is we all want.

MARGO

Well you pretty much know my story. Kahlia was a baby when Stewart and I adopted her. We brought her back to New York... lived here ever since. Stewart's mom has been ill a lot lately and it's hard for her to get out. Also, I believe someone Kahlia's age, should have a man around she could turn to.

OLIVER

*(to Kahlia)*

And what about you?

KAHLIA

I'm a good student. Not into drugs. I'm hoping to go to Columbia University, and I think I would like to teach.

OLIVER

Funny. If I hadn't accepted retirement, you might have been in one of my classes.

## Grandpa Was A Bachelor

KAHLIA

Oh. We visited there recently. I hope you're not the professor I heard so much about. I don't think he's there anymore.

OLIVER

Any references to voodoo dolls?

KAHLIA

Oh God. Mom...!

MARGO

I'm sure that's an exaggeration.

OLIVER

Possibly not.

KAHLIA

Mom, they said terrible things about him. . .!

MARGO

You mustn't put faith in gossip.

OLIVER

I'm sure it wasn't all true. Some maybe. Not all.

KAHLIA

Mom, they said he was mean and spiteful. We don't have to live with that. We're doing okay without him.

MARGO

Sweetheart, we're not committed to anything. Let's see if there's any chance of this working. Tell me you'll try. Do it for me.

KAHLIA (*reluctantly*)

Okay. But if he pulls any crap, let's just leave. Okay?

MARGO

That's a deal.

OLIVER

Exactly what kind of crap are we talking about?

KAHLIA

Like you thinking you're my father, or something.

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

OLIVER

I'm not even sure I want to be your *grandfather*, much less your father!

KAHLIA

You're not breaking my heart, you know.

MARGO

Kahlia!

OLIVER

No, ...that's all right. I appreciate her honesty. It's not comfortable, but it is refreshing.

MARGO

She's capable of refreshing one into a coma.

OLIVER

No doubt. But let's start over. It's possible I am that horrible person they were talking about. I've been known to be abrasive. Demanding. And intolerant of ignorance.

KAHLIA

They said you were the nastiest professor there. Or anywhere.

OLIVER

I'd like to think that's an exaggeration. But my students excelled because I insisted on excellence. And though I believe many educators are entirely too lenient, if pressed, it's not impossible for me to be caring and considerate. Even, indulgent.

KAHLIA

I wonder.

OLIVER

I'll admit it doesn't come easily. But if I say I'll really try to act reasonably, would you forgive me if I occasionally slipped up and behaved like....like...

KAHLIA

...an asshole...?

MARGO

Oh God.

OLIVER

I'm familiar with the expression. And on occasion I believe I've been known to be one.

*(beat)*

Actually, self-deprecation isn't as uncomfortable as you might think. It's almost fun.

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

KAHLIA

You admit being an asshole?

OLIVER

Let's not beat it into the ground, shall we? I'll concede rude and unattractive behavior. We don't have to crown it and hold a coronation!

KAHLIA

Mom...what do you think?

MARGO

I think he's copped to more faults than I gave him credit for. That's got to count for something.

OLIVER

Talk about left handed compliments...

KAHLIA *(to Oliver)*

Hmmm. Okay. I'll try if you'll try.

OLIVER

Margo, what do you think? Does peace and harmony stand a chance between this rude, insensitive child and myself?

MARGO

Damned if I know.

OLIVER

My feelings exactly. And since the unknown is not entirely without charm...let me show you the rest of the house..

*GO TO BLACK*

ACT II

SCENE 2 *-Several weeks later.*

*(Same set,. Kahlia sits at a small table working on a laptop computer. Margo enters, studies the girl.)*

MARGO

How's it going?

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

KAHLIA

Okay. I'm just finishing up an email.

MARGO

I meant with the Professor.

KAHLIA

We're marking our territories.

MARGO

You like your room?

KAHLIA

It's great! Only problem is he knows where it is.

MARGO

He's not bothering you, is he?

KAHLIA

He bothers me all the time.

MARGO

He comes into your room...?

KAHLIA

Oh, no. Never. He just bothers me, that's all. You know, acts like he knows everything.

MARGO

Well, he was a professor. And he is brilliant. I've been reading some of his essays. Very insightful.

KAHLIA

Maybe with literature. With people, he doesn't know poop.

MARGO

Look, if this isn't working out... I mean, I'm still holding our apartment.

KAHLIA

No. It's nice here. And he hasn't done anything *too* stupid. But he is weird. It's that, after Dad...I mean, I finally got used to it just being you and me. And I really miss Dad.

MARGO

Me, too.

## Grandpa Was A Bachelor

*(Oliver enters carrying a blackboard which he exchanges for the painting on the easel. They watch him set it up.)*

KAHLIA

What's that?

OLIVER

Dear God, it's worse than I feared. This, my dear, is a chalk board.

*(holding up a piece of chalk)*

And this is chalk. One uses it to write words on the board. You've heard of writing, haven't you?

KAHLIA

You're pissing me off, old man.

OLIVER

I thought we had settled that "old man" thing.

KAHLIA

Not yet.

MARGO

All right! Enough of this crap! Now, Kahlia, I won't have you disrespecting the professor. Is that understood? And professor, stop being snide and condescending. She's not stupid. And she's not one of your students. If you want to be her grandfather... start acting like one.

*(Both Kahlia and Oliver are stunned into silence. Kahlia recovers quickly, Oliver doesn't know what to do)*

KAHLIA *(pleased)*

Go, Mom...!

OLIVER

Mrs. Altman, I am not used to being spoken to that way.

MARGO

Well, get used to it. Grandfathers are obliged to take a lot of shit, it's part of the curriculum. And you can't say you weren't warned.

OLIVER

Doesn't make it anymore pleasant, however.

## Grandpa Was A Bachelor

MARGO

I am sorry. But this isn't one of your classrooms. This is part of being a family. And you're right... it's not always pleasant. *(beat)* If you can't handle it, we can call a halt and we'll just go home.

OLIVER *(a long beat)*

I thought...I thought *this* was home.

*(Margo reacts with pleasant surprise, and then smiles. Kahlia responds with gentle confusion.)*

KAHLIA

What's with you? I mean, you keep acting like a real ... I mean you get real nasty and then you say something ...I don't know...gentle. Sweet, sort of. You keep knocking me off balance. I don't know where I'm at.

OLIVER

Please forgive me. I don't mean to be one of those things I admitted I sometimes was.

KAHLIA

An "asshole."

OLIVER

I believe that covers it.

MARGO

Will you two please stop this crap?

OLIVER

Actually, it's not crap. We're defining our terms.

MARGO

You're both making me crazy.

OLIVER *(to Kahlia)*

Now why does that sound like it could be fun?

KAHLIA

'Cause sometimes it is. For years I did my best to make her a drooling mess.

OLIVER *(to Margo)*

And you were aware of this?

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

MARGO

Of course. The real challenge for every mother is to survive her children's craziness. We usually do it out of spite.

OLIVER

You know, once past my initial shock I thought it might actually be simpler grandfathering an older child. I see I have a lot to learn.

MARGO

You have no idea.

OLIVER

All right. Kahlia, I thought that as long as we had the time, I could help you prepare for some of your classes. Possibly even college. Perhaps I presumed too much.

KAHLIA

Maybe when I need help, maybe then I'll call on you. 'Til then...please don't assume anything. It just pisses me off.

OLIVER

Fair enough. But I'll ask you to keep in mind I have held a position of esteem for most of my life. And I insist that my profession be respected even if you feel that regard cannot be extended to me.

KAHLIA

Well, as you say...fair enough.

*GO TO BLACK*

ACT II

SCENE 3

*(Once again Oliver stands before the painting holding a paint brush and making half-hearted attempts to do something with it. Margo enters and joins Oliver before the painting. She studies it.)*

MARGO

The paint on that is completely dry. How long have you been working at it?

OLIVER

Six years.

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

MARGO

When do you think it'll be finished?

OLIVER

Never.

MARGO

Why not?

OLIVER

Look at it! It's dreadful. What I should do is paint with a roller.

MARGO

It's not that bad.

*(long beat)*

Okay, it is. Still, for an amateur.... What did you have in mind when you started?

OLIVER

I began this shortly after Esther died. I was going to call it "Depression," but that was too cheerful.

MARGO

Then I'd say you captured it perfectly.

*(Kahlia enters, furious. She strides to Oliver and glares at him. He has no idea what to do.)*

MARGO

What's the problem?

KAHLIA

He's gone into my room and touched my stuff!

OLIVER

I did no such thing!

KAHLIA

You did! Something personal of mine was opened and read.

OLIVER

Kahlia, you may think dreadful things about me, but I am neither a liar, nor a Nosy Parker.

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

KAHLIA

Well, there are only three of us here, and mom never pries into my personal stuff. So it had to be you.

MARGO

What personal stuff are you talking about?

KAHLIA

He knows what I'm talking about! Just because this is your house that doesn't give you the right to invade my privacy!

OLIVER

Kahlia, I assure you.....

KAHLIA

I hate that! I just hate it!

OLIVER

That room was Esther's private retreat. I haven't been in there for six years!

MARGO (*to Kahlila*)

What exactly are you talking about?

KAHLIA

My poetry! I have very private thoughts in them.

MARGO

Fine! But how can you make accusations like that. What makes you think it was the Professor who was in there.

KAHLIA

Because that's the kind of thing he would do!

OLIVER

I didn't, Kahlia. I swear to you, I didn't.

MARGO

No. He didn't. I did.

KAHLIA

Mom...!

MARGO

I washed that new blouse of yours and went in there to hang it up. I didn't mean to pry, but some papers had blown onto the floor and when I picked them up, I read them. I'm

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

sorry. It wasn't intentional, it just happened. Now, if I owe you an apology...you've got it. But you owe the professor one!

*(Kahlia glares at both of them, then turns and runs out.)*

*BLACK OUT*

ACT II

SCENE 4

*(Kahlia at Oliver's computer on the living room desk. At the same time she is talking on the phone.)*

KAHLIA

Oh, my God...look at that! Now that's ridiculous. Somebody could get hurt!

*(listening, before speaking)*

No! Of course not! You have??? That? Wow, I'm impressed. Really?

Well, of course I've thought about it, but not hanging upside down!

*(Oliver enters, starts to pass her heading for the front door and then notices the computer screen. He stops, wide-eyed.)*

OLIVER

WHAT IS THAT?

*(He tries tilting his head to see it more clearly.)*

KAHLIA

Linda, I'll call you back.

*(She turns off the computer and glares at Oliver.)*

If you don't recognize what you just saw, then I'll quote the immortal Professor Westhollow: "My God, this is worse than I thought."

OLIVER

WHAT WAS THAT?

## Grandpa Was A Bachelor

KAHLIA

Porn. And what you observed was two people having sex. “You’ve heard of sex, haven’t you?”

OLIVER

SEX? On my computer?

KAHLIA

Would you rather it was here in your living room?

OLIVER

Does your mother know you’re watching pornography?

KAHLIA

I certainly hope not.

*(beat)*

You’re not going to tell her, are you?

OLIVER

I don’t know. But, I don’t think you should be watching that sort of thing. I don’t approve of pornography. On my computer or hanging from a beam.

KAHLIA

You don’t approve??? You’re not my father!

OLIVER

No. But I am trying to be a good grandfather.

KAHLIA

Well, you’re acting like a sanctimonious old prig.

OLIVER

I hope I heard you right. If so, I’m not a prude. I like the same kinds of things other people do. Still, there’s a substantial difference between the relationship people have who love one another, and pornography. Especially when perverted. Or in this case, inverted.

KAHLIA

I know that! Porn is just....just something to look at. It’s fun to watch. My friends do it all the time.

OLIVER

I’d rather you didn’t.

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

KAHLIA

Okay, it's your computer. I'll use my laptop.

OLIVER

Don't be obtuse! Your computer or mine...it doesn't matter. You shouldn't be watching that kind of thing.

KAHLIA

DON'T TELL ME WHAT I SHOULD OR SHOULDN'T DO!

OLIVER

Unless I'm mistaken, being a grandfather gives me that privilege.

KAHLIA

Well, it doesn't!

OLIVER

*(beat)*

That's very disappointing. However, if that's the case I'll keep my counsel to myself.

KAHLIA

I'd appreciate that.

*(Margo enters, noting the tension between Kahlia and Oliver.)*

MARGO

What's going on here?

OLIVER *(after a pause)*

We've been discussing a form of Civil Rights.

MARGO

And there's some dispute about them?

OLIVER

Apparently.

KAHLIA

I'll be in my room.

*(Kahlia rises and exits. Margo studies Oliver.)*

MARGO

Oliver....???

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

OLIVER

I'm pretty sure this isn't working.

MARGO

What are we talking about?

OLIVER

You asked me once if I knew what a grandfather was. Or, what one was supposed to do. Well, I don't think I know.

MARGO

Talk to me.

OLIVER

She doesn't like me, Margo. Not at all. And I am really trying.

MARGO

She's a complex young person. Sometimes I think she doesn't like me, either.

OLIVER

Yes. But you know she loves you. She doesn't share that particular franchise with me.

MARGO

She's had a hard time, Oliver. It took awhile before she showed affection to anyone.

OLIVER

Affection is several dimensions beyond what I'm talking about. I'd say Kahlia's feelings for me are a lot closer to disgust. Or, loathing.

MARGO

I think you're wrong. But what exactly happened here?

OLIVER

I was expressing a preference. About something that was taking place.

MARGO

So, what was it?

OLIVER

I'd rather not say.

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

MARGO

Well, if you can't even tell *me*, then perhaps it was too unreasonable for Kahlia as well.

OLIVER

That was certainly her reaction.

MARGO

Are you going to tell me what it was about?

OLIVER

No, I don't think I am.

MARGO

I can't help if you won't confide in me.

OLIVER

I think this is something that has to be worked out between Kahlia and myself. There's nothing mysterious about it, I'm just trying to show a grandfather's respect for a confidence.

MARGO

She'll come around, you know. A lot has happened in her young life. Her parents dying. Stewart dying... moving here...you. It just takes a little time. And patience.

OLIVER

It's all right, Margo. I'm not going to turn the two of you out. I'm merely trying to make a difficult relationship work. I've never done that before. Never even tried. I don't seem to be too good at it.

MARGO

Don't sell yourself short. If Kahlia has some difficulty showing she cares, she has no problem whatever showing she doesn't. And there hasn't been too much of that.

OLIVER

Of course there has. And I don't much like it. You know, when I was teaching, if a student didn't like me I could ignore it. But it's hard to ignore someone who lives in your home. And with whom you're trying to establish a lasting relationship.

MARGO

Tell me the truth. Would you rather we weren't here?

OLIVER

I don't know. I'm finding her rejection unexpectedly painful. I wasn't prepared for that.

## Grandpa Was A Bachelor

MARGO

What do you want me to do, Oliver? If this is too much for you, perhaps we should leave.

OLIVER

No! I don't want you to. Surprisingly, I like having you both here. And more surprising, is that I really care about the two of you.

MARGO

Then you'll just have to be patient. There's a lot of love in that girl. But she's afraid of being hurt. Despite her tough and arrogant manner, she's really quite delicate.

OLIVER

Well, she hides it perfectly.

MARGO (*Margo laughs*)

What do you want me to do?

OLIVER

Tell me how I can make it work.

MARGO

All right, I'll try. You know she's very independent. So, don't try to tell her what to do. That's one thing.

OLIVER

But what if I truly believe that what she's doing is wrong?

MARGO

Tell me. I'll talk to her.

OLIVER

But suppose it's something she doesn't want you to know?

MARGO

Other than that poetry, she has no secrets from me. I'd know if she did.

OLIVER

I doubt that. The beauty of having a secret is that others don't know about it.

MARGO

Oliver, Kahlia and I are very close. She tells me everything.

## Grandpa Was A Bachelor

OLIVER

Trust me, she doesn't. Nor should she. We're all entitled to certain private thoughts.

MARGO

Then I think you know more about being a grandfather than you think you do.

OLIVER

This is much more difficult than I anticipated.

MARGO

That's probably true. But you're really doing fine! Honestly. You just have to realize you can't force-feed her your opinions.

OLIVER

So even if I think she's doing something wrong, I should keep my mouth shut?

MARGO

What's wrong to you, may be perfectly normal for someone her age.

OLIVER

But suppose it's something morally ...I don't know... disgusting.

MARGO

Has she done something disgusting that you know of?

OLIVER

Not exactly. Maybe she stumbled upon it. But didn't turn away.

MARGO

You aren't by any chance talking about her secretly watching pornography on occasion?

OLIVER

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

MARGO

I think maybe you do. I know she sometimes looks at it. I don't like it, but I'd rather she experimented that way than in actuality.

OLIVER

*(almost to himself)*

My God, the things I don't know....!

MARGO

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

You're not alone in that. Most men have no idea what women are about.

OLIVER

But, pornography....!

MARGO

Some women like it, some don't. With Kahlia, it's just curiosity. Natural curiosity, I might add.

OLIVER

Well, I hope she outgrows it.

MARGO

She will. The real thing is much more exciting.

OLIVER

By God, she was right. I am a prig.

MARGO

Did I hear you correctly?

OLIVER

I am a bloody, self-righteous prude. And I didn't even know it!

*(Margo turns on her heel and starts to exit. As she does she says:)*

MARGO

That's all right, Oliver. Everyone else knew it.

*GO TO BLACK*

ACT III

SCENE 1 - *Several weeks later.*

*(Same set, messier, Female clothing is draped here and there. Books and one or two stuffed dolls are on the floor, and a television set has suddenly appeared on the*

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

*scene. Oliver lies on the sofa reading.  
Kahlia enters and goes to him hesitantly.)*

KAHLIA

Can I ask you a question?

OLIVER

Unless I'm mistaken, you just did.

KAHLIA

Thanks a lot.

*(She turns to go but is stopped  
when Oliver says:)*

OLIVER

No, wait. I'm sorry, I was trying to be funny.

KAHLIA

Professor, "funny" is not your style.

OLIVER

No. Of course not. I'm sorry. Honest. What was your question?

KAHLIA

Never mind.

OLIVER

Please! Kahlia. I apologized. Be gracious enough to accept it.

KAHLIA *(after a beat)*

Okay.

OLIVER

What was the question?

KAHLIA

We were told today to write an essay on "Being in the Instant." I don't even know what that means.

OLIVER

Depends on whether they meant making the most of your time - or more literally, what is it you're doing at any particular instant.

*(beat)*

Some time ago I wrote a short story on "Capturing The Moment." I suspect you were being asked to do something similar.

## Grandpa Was A Bachelor

KAHLIA

How do you capture a moment?

OLIVER

What are you doing this very instant?

KAHLIA

Standing here. Talking to you.

OLIVER

All right. Now what's happening around you? Listen, do you hear anything? Smell anything? What do you see.

KAHLIA

You. And I hear my own breathing.

OLIVER

How about the refrigerator in the kitchen? I hear it. And I smell something cooking. We stand in what once was a neat, beautiful room unsullied by female underwear. That, of course was an instant from the past. Standing here, I'm talking with a beautiful young lady with a pained expression on her face, At the same time, my foot itches and my behind hurts. I'd say this was a pretty busy moment.

KAHLIA

Is that what you wrote about.

OLIVER

Pretty much. I took what was occurring around me and wrote about it. For instance: a neighbor's carnal moment was outside screaming for ice cream. I felt like sneezing, and then noticed a bug had fallen in my glass of grapefruit juice and in that instant learned grapefruit juice was an acquired taste.

KAHLIA

I hate grapefruit juice.

OLIVER

Apparently the bug did too. But to escape, it would have to climb a glass wall the equivalent of several stories. With no handholds. While a fairly pedestrian moment for me, it was a momentous one for the bug. One in which it found swimming in grapefruit juice was a picnic compared to being flushed down the toilet. I thought it made a funny story.

KAHLIA

You flushed your juice down the toilet?

## Grandpa Was A Bachelor

OLIVER

Yes. And very nearly tossed in my lunch when I realized I had been drinking the juice with the bug already in it.

KAHLIA

Now, *that's* funny.

OLIVER

Took a while before I thought so.

*(SFX: DOORBELL)*

IT'S OPEN.

*(James and Alice enter. Oliver introduces Kahlia).*

OLIVER

James...Alice....this is Kahlia. She's my ...she's ...she's Margo's daughter.

*(After they greet one another, Kahlia says:)*

KAHLIA

I'd better go. I've got an assignment to write.

*(When she is gone, James turns to Oliver.)*

JAMES

I thought you wanted little kids.

OLIVER

I thought so, too. But I got *her*. She's not easy, but she is very special. I'm not in the least unhappy about it.

JAMES

Does she call you grandpa?

OLIVER

No. Just "professor." But I have hopes.

*(beat)*

So, how are the boys?

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

ALICE

They're fine. But that's about all that is.

JAMES

Go ahead. Tell him.

ALICE

I can't without swearing. You tell him.

JAMES

Well, after we talked to you, we got kind of excited about the idea of the boys having a grandfather. One of my associates knew an older gentleman who recently lost his wife and was feeling lonely and depressed.

ALICE

I blame you for this, Oliver.

OLIVER

Me? Why? For what?

ALICE

For turning us down.

JAMES

Anyway, we met Frank... seemed a nice enough person. So we invited him to stay with us awhile. A couple of days later he called and said it was a great idea. We thought it would be like what you wanted....you know, to be some kind of model for the boys.

OLIVER

Isn't he?

JAMES

Not the kind we had in mind.

ALICE

So, he moved in. And now we can't get rid of him. We're going crazy.

OLIVER

What's the problem?

ALICE

He snores. He drinks. He farts.

JAMES

A lot. And loud.

## Grandpa Was A Bachelor

ALICE

He thinks it's funny. Now the boys are doing it. Not the drinking, the farting. They think it's hysterical.

OLIVER

Maybe he can't help it. Maybe he laughs to cover his embarrassment.

ALICE

No. That's his kind of humor.

JAMES

Also, his drinking is really out of hand.

ALICE

You know what happens when someone drinks too much and can't hold it.

JAMES

He throws up so violently I'm afraid he's going to have a heart attack.

ALICE

What should we do about Frank?

OLIVER

Don't ask me! I'm terrible at relationships. I can't even get Kahlia to like me a little. And I'm being really good.

ALICE

Now, if *you* had come with us and acted like Frank, I'd have no problem throwing you out. But I'm afraid of hurting Frank's feelings.

OLIVER

Thank you very much.

ALICE

I just don't think you're that sensitive.

OLIVER

Yes. Well, it seems that's not entirely true.

JAMES

You having some difficulty with Kahlia.?

OLIVER

She doesn't like me. Emotionally makes certain I don't get close.

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

ALICE

You did that with me...!

OLIVER

You worked for me. It would have been unseemly to be too kindly toward you.

ALICE

Oh. Well, that makes it much better.

JAMES

Why do you suppose she's so distant?

OLIVER

She was orphaned as a baby, and then lost the father who adopted her. And now there's *me*.

JAMES

But you're there for her, aren't you? Sounds like she's just being self-protective.

OLIVER

Probably. It hurts, nonetheless. I didn't think this would happen, but I have feelings for Margo and Kahlia. I've come to care about them. Deeply. And for some reason. . . I want them to care about me! Foolish, I suppose.

JAMES

I expect it'll just take some time, Professor. She may find you a little ... formidable.

ALICE

Yeah. Terrific. So what should we do about Frank?

OLIVER

I really don't know. Sit down with him, I suppose, talk it out. Tell him his behavior is inappropriate and rude. And that you don't want that kind of thing going on around your boys.

JAMES

That's what I said!

OLIVER

Crass behavior or not, unless he's plain stupid, he knows better. It just has to be pointed out to him.

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

ALICE

If we toss him out, would you consider moving in?

OLIVER

No.

ALICE

WHY NOT???

OLIVER

Alice, I'm committed to Margo and Kahlia. They may not feel that way about me, but I can only deal with my own sentiments.

ALICE

You'd turn us down, for them???

OLIVER

In a heartbeat. Not James. You.

JAMES

Professor...that's cruel.

OLIVER

Okay. You, too.

ALICE

I'm serious.

OLIVER

Alice, you'd want me around as some kind of facsimile of a grandfather. Which is all right because that's actually what I am. But you don't have a real need for me. I'd be a kind of self supporting convenience for you and the boys. Margo and Kahlia, I feel, really need me. They may not know it yet, but I believe I could become genuinely important to them. And that's become important to me.

JAMES *(to Alice)*

I told you behind all his bullshit he's a softie.

OLIVER

Yes. Well, that also comes as something of a surprise. I am learning that with all my education, I don't know squat.

JAMES

You're discovering new arenas of importance, that's all.

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

*(Margo and Kahlia enter. Margo, James and Alice greet one another.)*

MARGO

Professor, could we speak to you privately for a moment?

*(James and Alice drift off to one side of the stage and converse quietly. Oliver turns to Margo and Kahlia.)*

OLIVER

Ladies, what can I do for you?

MARGO

Oliver, I think we need your help. I know something's disturbing Kahlia and she won't tell me what it is. Maybe she'll tell you.

OLIVER *(warily)*

Really? All right.

MARGO *(to Kahlia)*

Please, go ahead. Tell him.

KAHLIA

I'm not saying anything to him or to you. I've nothing to say! Why don't you just leave me alone?

*(James and Alice start for the front door.)*

JAMES

Professor, we've got to get home to the boys. We're going to sit down with our... problem and talk it out. See you soon.

*(They exit.)*

MARGO

Kahlia, I know you very well, and my instinct tells me there's something going on that's disturbing you. If you won't confide in me... he's all we've got.

KAHLIA

Oh, I hate this. I really do.

MARGO

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

I'm going to leave you two alone. Please, Kahlia, get it out.  
(*Margo exits.*)

OLIVER

Kahlia, if I can help in any way, I will. If you think it's appropriate, and that you can trust me.

KAHLIA

Why would I think I couldn't trust you?

OLIVER

Well, you don't seem to like me very much, and we don't usually trust people we don't like.

KAHLIA

What makes you think I don't like you?

OLIVER

Because of the way you behave toward me. . .? You talk to me only when necessary. Rarely spend time with me voluntarily. . .and I truly understand that. But I find it hurtful when your attitude always seems to say, "keep away."

KAHLIA

I really act that way toward you?

OLIVER

Maybe I'm misinterpreting. I really hope I am, because I care about you. Honest. I'd be proud to be your real grandfather.

KAHLIA

Wow. I thought *you* didn't like *me*.

OLIVER

Then I apologize for anything I've done to make you think that.

KAHLIA (*long beat*)

There is something. I can't talk to mom about it. And I don't think I can tell you, either. It's too personal.

OLIVER

I once said I didn't even know if I wanted to be your grandfather, much less your father. I was wrong on all accounts. And if you want to keep me at arms length forever, I'll live with that. But now that you're in my life, I desperately want to keep you there.

## Grandpa Was A Bachelor

KAHLIA

Oh, man...you're going to make me cry.

OLIVER

I don't want to do that. But whatever it is that's bothering you ... and I'll admit right now I don't know if I have any answers ... I'll listen and keep an open mind. So no matter how personal it might be, or uncomfortable for me...I will be honest and straightforward with you. And if you want, I'll never tell your mom.

KAHLIA

Okay. I'm going to pretend you're my real dad, and I've come to him with a problem, and he's the kind of dad that I could go to with any problem.

OLIVER

I'll try with all my heart to be that man.

KAHLIA

Okay. Here goes. There's a lot of peer pressure to have sex.

OLIVER

Oh, God...

KAHLIA

And I kind of want to. But I'm also afraid to.

OLIVER

Why didn't you talk to your mother about this? She'd be much better at it than me.

KAHLIA

I don't want to disappoint her. She thinks I'm an angel. And I'm not.

OLIVER

All right. Are you asking me if you should.... you know ...do IT?

KAHLIA

Oh, I know I shouldn't. But I kind of really want to.

OLIVER

That's much more of a consideration. Because now you're bringing in strength of character. I mean, clearly, someone your age is much too vulnerable...in every way...to have a sexual relationship. Boys are far too immature to know anything more than what their bodies are crying out for. But, I suspect you already know that.

KAHLIA

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

Yeah. They're not too subtle.

OLIVER

So, the problem...if there is a problem...is dealing with your own wants. As difficult as it may be to believe, I've been your age. I know those wants are real. And not so easy to keep under control.

KAHLIA

That's kind of an understatement.

OLIVER

I remember it well. However, it seems to me you are the one you have to answer to. The drives are natural. Knowing when it's the proper time is a matter of maturity and character. I suspect you have a lot of both, Kahlia. So you already know what you're going to do.

KAHLIA (*long beat*)

You're a lot smarter than I thought.

OLIVER

I used to think I was brilliant. You've taught me humility.

(*Margo calls out from offstage.*)

MARGO (*O.S.*)

Can I come back yet?

KAHLIA (*calling out*)

Yeah. It's safe.

(*Margo reenters and looks questioningly from Kahlia to Oliver.*)

MARGO

Is everything okay?

KAHLIA

Yeah, Mom. The Professor's been a big help.

MARGO

You going to tell me what was bothering you?

KAHLIA

I've been asked out by a senior. I didn't know what to do.

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

MARGO

You could've come to me with that. All right Professor, you're a man, what did you tell her to expect.

OLIVER

Well, I know nothing about whoever asked her out. What's he like, this boy? It is a boy, isn't it?

KAHLIA

Yes....!

OLIVER

Well, that's both a curse and a blessing. Do you like him?

KAHLIA

He's interesting. Cute in a bizarre kind of way, but interesting.

OLIVER

Well, doesn't *interesting* promise some kind of entertainment? I'd consider that a more important factor than appearance. Good looks tend to go after awhile.

KAHLIA

He didn't propose marriage! He just asked me out for one night.

OLIVER

Of course. Forgive me. All right, he's interesting. And clearly he must see something in you that he likes. Right?

KAHLIA

I guess...

OLIVER

And you must see something you like or you'd have just said no. That said, I'm inclined to think you probably want to go out with him. So where does he want to take you?

KAHLIA

To the Met.

OLIVER

Opera or museum? Or is that some kind of new stockade that serves coffee?

KAHLIA

The Metropolitan Opera House.

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

OLIVER

A good sign. Which opera?

KAHLIA

La Boheme.

OLIVER

Marvelous! He sounds like an interesting, intelligent person. And hopefully, an understanding one. That's a beautiful, romantic opera. You'll love it. He sounds special, this boy, and clearly must think you're *very* special. As indeed, you truly are.

KAHLIA

Really????

OLIVER

Oh, my dear Kahlia...you've no idea.

KAHLIA

Okay. I'll go with him. The opera's more than enough for one night.

*(She turns to go. Then stops.)*

Thanks, grandpa.

*(She exits.)*

MARGO

Well, how about that, old man? She finally said it.

OLIVER

I'm speechless. Delighted beyond comprehension. But speechless!

MARGO

And that would be another, more classic, first.

*(Margo turns to leave, then stops.)*

But what you just said to her was very sweet. Thank you.

*(Margo comes back and kisses him on the cheek. Oliver stands there stunned. Margo turns to walk off and stops when Oliver speaks).*

Grandpa Was A Bachelor

OLIVER

Wait! Wait! What am I supposed to do now?

MARGO

Show her whatever love you feel for her. And let her show how she feels toward you. And stop being a smart ass.

OLIVER

And the kiss. How am I supposed to respond to that?

MARGO

How should I know? If it offended you, treat it with antibiotics. If you liked it...try to earn another one

OLIVER (*long beat*)

I've got it. I think I've finally got it.

MARGO

What? Understanding?

OLIVER

No. A family.

GO TO BLACK

- END OF PLAY -