

were first married sometimes I'd wake up and look over at him and ... and I'd wonder, "Who is this person?" I know he's Gavin and I know he's my husband but I ... just ... who is he? And just recently I've started doing it again. Period of adjustment, I suppose, but just the other night — *(She listens, then smiles.)* You're kidding. Oh thank God I thought it was just me. But you're still practically newlyweds we're coming up on thirty years and — *(She reacts to Linda.)* Are you okay? Oh ... she's active, huh? ... *(Lights rise on Jeremiah in his room.)*

JEREMIAH. "African village. Day."

MELANIE. You're sure you don't mind? *(She reaches out, making contact just as the baby kicks; Melanie pulls back on instinct, then she smiles and reaches out again as the lights fade.)*

JEREMIAH. "The air, filled with hot dust and the smell of dead animals and human waste make it painful to breathe. A young boy kicks his only toy, a battered soccer ball." *(Lights rise on the Miller home. Offstage we hear Gavin and Melanie calling "good night.")*

"Suddenly, a scream pierces the village." *(Lights begin to fade on him as Gavin and Melanie enter. He moves immediately to the couch; she looks a little tense.)* "Another scream, this one even more painful ..."

MELANIE. Now was that so painful?

GAVIN. Define "painful." *(He turns on the TV. Lighting should give the impression that whatever he's watching is in black and white.)*

MELANIE. You were very ... civil.

GAVIN. What's that supposed to mean?

MELANIE. It means you were polite. Told a couple funny stories. Then the wall went up.

GAVIN. What'd you want — card tricks? This was not my idea.

MELANIE. I just wanted —

GAVIN. Ohhh — *Best Years of Our Lives*. 1946 Best Picture. I love this movie.

MELANIE. Did you like them? He's kind of quiet —

GAVIN. They're fine, okay. Just don't get too ... attached.

MELANIE. What's that supposed to mean?

GAVIN. I know how you are with people. Since we moved back here you've started collecting them.

MELANIE. Maybe you should try it. Might be nice if you had someone to —

GAVIN. Mel, please. *(Silence.)*

MELANIE. So what does a water lawyer do?

GAVIN. Sues fish. I don't know. *(Off her look.)* Environmental

stuff. *(Silence, except for muffled dialogue from the television.)*

MELANIE. Everything okay?

GAVIN. Yeah, fine. *(Silence.)*

MELANIE. You want me to unpack your office for you? *(No response.)* I went up to get some envelopes today and —

GAVIN. I'll take care of it.

MELANIE. When? How many years are you going to climb over those boxes? I just thought —

GAVIN. They're fine, hon —

MELANIE. But you've got all those empty book shelves and it's kind of silly to —

GAVIN. They're fine —

MELANIE. I don't mind —

GAVIN. Mel, I've used up all my dialogue being "civil" to your friends tonight. May I watch the movie please?

MELANIE. Fine. *(Silence.)*

GAVIN. I love this scene. Frederic March is so great. Come on, sit with me. *(She doesn't move.)* Myrna Loy, God. Wyler does a great shot here. Look at the way she's gazing up at her husband. She wasn't even nominated for this. Myrna Loy ... the perfect wife.

MELANIE. Why — because she's dead? *(Heading off.)* I'm gonna read.

GAVIN. Watch the movie. *(He stretches out on the couch; lights rise on Jeremiah.)*

MELANIE. I've seen it. *(Lights fade on the Millers as Gavin moves to his classroom.)*

JEREMIAH. "The boy sees the chief's wife, Maccacu, on the floor, about to give birth. Zoom in on: the midwife, lying dead a few feet away."

GAVIN. Act one. Twenty-six to thirty pages — no more. They're my favorite act to write because they're a breeze. Just as in life, the first act is usually pretty easy ... *(Lights shift to Jeremiah as Gavin sits to read pages.)*

JEREMIAH. Is it okay? More like what you wanted? I couldn't work any lions in. *(Gavin indicates "shut up" as he reads.)*

GAVIN. "The boy starts forward, then freezes. A deadly black mamba snake lies next to the midwife. The snake rears back, as if ready to strike." *(He says nothing for a moment, then looks up at the anxious kid.)* This is great! Great! Why didn't you show this in class?

JEREMIAH. I can't. I told you —

GAVIN. Well, start. This overtime's curtain into my cocktail hour. *(Pacing.)* It's a great opening and you know why? It's visual. They hate dialogue — they're still pissed off about *The Jazz Singer*. But this — high angle, empty village, soccer by himself — this is a lonely kid, right? *(Jeremiah nods.)* So what happens next?

JEREMIAH. He delivers the baby and when the other villagers get back —

GAVIN. Whoa — back up. What happened to the snake? What's he do?

JEREMIAH. Sits there.

GAVIN. You just lost Spielberg.

JEREMIAH. That's what happened. I delivered the baby and —

GAVIN. This happened? *(Jeremiah nods.)* You're this little kid? *(Jeremiah keeps nodding.)* Talk, please. You look like a bobble head.

JEREMIAH. It all happened. *(Silence.)*

GAVIN. Boy, did I have a boring childhood. So what'd you do?

JEREMIAH. I got the baby out and then we just sat there, waiting for the others. Husband came in and killed the snake with a machete.

GAVIN. So you're in this shack with a deadly snake just a few feet away —

JEREMIAH. They only attack when they're provoked. Figured if we sat there —

GAVIN. But there was a dead body on the floor!

JEREMIAH. *(Simply.)* You see a lot of dead bodies over there. It is a third world country. *(A bear, as Gavin processes this, amazes that the kid can remain so calm.)*

GAVIN. Okay ... well, it's a good start, but the opening doesn't work yet —

JEREMIAH. You liked it —

GAVIN. I know, but —

JEREMIAH. You said so —

GAVIN. Whoa —

JEREMIAH. Your tongue is like a sharp razor! You said —

GAVIN. Hey, back up! Rule number one — don't get defensive. I'm just tryin' to teach you something here. You got a problem with that — take a hike. *(Silence.)*

JEREMIAH. Sorry.

GAVIN. Where'd you get that dialogue? *(Jeremiah is blank.)* The "sharp razor" line.

JEREMIAH. Psalms, 52.

GAVIN. Look, never use stuff like that. It's really bad ... Charlton Heston. *(He moves to the board, illustrating his point.)* Now, you put this kid in a great dilemma but you're cheatin' yourself on the payoff. In your version, snake doesn't move. Boring! Try this. Kid sees snake. Freezes. Snake gets closer and now we realize ... the kid's barefoot!

JEREMIAH. I had shoes —

GAVIN. More suspense. And that'll help with the opening. He's kicking the soccer ball with bare feet. Automatically, we feel sorry for the kid. *(Moving to the board.)* Think — how can you build up the suspense?

JEREMIAH. The uhhh ... woman could scream. Flail her arms —

GAVIN. Resulting in?

JEREMIAH. It scares the snake!

GAVIN. Good. Now, the boy — what's he want? Always know at all times what your characters want.

JEREMIAH. He wants to save the mother and baby — oh, oh! Could he maybe drop the baby? They're real slippery when they come out and —

GAVIN. Your instinct is right. I would just avoid dropping babies in the opening scene. *(Tosses Jeremiah the chalk.)* Draw it. A floor plan — where everything was. Never trust your memory.

JEREMIAH. *(As he draws.)* Cot was here. Boy here. Midwife. Snake here.

GAVIN. Door?

JEREMIAH. Oh, right. *(He draws it.)*

GAVIN. No! No, no, no, no, no.

JEREMIAH. But that's where it —

GAVIN. Kills the suspense. Why?

JEREMIAH. *(Studying it.)* Because ... because ... he could just run out.

GAVIN. Exactly! Move the snake.

JEREMIAH. Here?

GAVIN. Right. Between the kid and the door. Now, how do we get the kid out of this?

JEREMIAH. *(Checking his list.)* The soccer ball! He ... uhhh — he kicks the soccer ball and — wham! — kills the snake.

GAVIN. What is he — James Bond all the sudden? Try again.

JEREMIAH. Well ... the snake starts towards the woman because she's screaming — scaring it —