

## The Beach House

by

James O'Sullivan

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The Players:

Belinda (Mum)  
Ellen (Grandma)  
Arthur (Granddad)  
Abigail (Daughter)  
Jarvis (Son)  
Fern (Girlfriend)

**Scene:** The lounge of a beach house in the coastal resort town of Pauanui. The kitchen joins the lounge, demarcated by a bench. It is obvious from the lavish furnishings that rich people have their holidays here. There is a sofa and three chairs. It is summer and there is plenty of light.

*BELINDA and ELLEN walk in carrying luggage and grocery bags. BELINDA is a forty-five-year-old woman and ELLEN is her mother; in her late seventies. They are both well dressed in resort wear.*

Belinda: Are you sure you're alright with that bag, Mum?

Ellen: (*Curtly.*) Yes, I'm perfectly fine, thank you.

Belinda: I was just asking...

Ellen: I know what you were just asking. I'm not decrepit yet.

*BELINDA puts down her luggage, runs her finger along the kitchen bench top and checks her finger for dust.*

Belinda: The cleaners did a good job.

Ellen: That's a minor miracle in itself.

Belinda: You're too cynical, Mum.

Ellen: A healthy cynicism, Belinda, is an ideal companion in old age. It justifies being suspicious of everything and committed to nothing.

Belinda: Well, it's good to be back in Pauanui. I haven't been away for well over a month.  
*(Opens a window.)* Hmm. Smell that clean ocean air.

Ellen: Smells like dead fish and rotten seaweed.

Belinda: I think it's good to get out of Auckland and get back to basic living. Recharge and refocus. Keep our lives in balance.

Ellen: What nonsense is that?

Belinda: It's not nonsense. Bradley my life coach says I must have a good life balance.

Ellen: Life coach? What on Earth is a life coach? Why do you even need a coach for life? Life isn't that hard.

Belinda: Bradley said it's important to get away from the hustle and bustle, and get in touch with what's really important, the simple pleasures.

*BELINDA gets out a Mac computer from a bag.*

Ellen: Why have you brought that thing along?

Belinda: Rachel may have sent me the drafts for the Belinda Gibson Foundation charter.

Ellen: Oh yes, the charity that you have so modestly attached your name to.

Belinda: Plenty of big stars lend their names to charities.

Ellen: Yes, and they all have big egos to match.

Belinda: You saying I have a big ego?

Ellen: I'm saying you need a hobby.

Belinda: Bradley says charity is good for the soul.

Ellen: What if Bradley told you to jump off the Auckland Harbour Bridge?

Belinda: What would be the point of that?

Ellen: Why don't you get a hobby, or do something really outrageous and seek gainful employment?

Belinda: You are such a hypocrite, Mum. Anyway, it's not a crime to do good things for other people.

Ellen: You mean do good for yourself. Altruism is like masturbation.

Belinda: Oh, for goodness sakes, Mum.

Ellen: Perfectly acceptable in private, but it just looks vulgar in public.

Belinda: I'd hate to be as cynical as you.

Ellen: Where's that Sauvignon Blanc?

Belinda: The 2009 Clos Henri Malborough?

Ellen: No, the 2010 Saint Clair Wairau Reserve.

Belinda: Um, try the blue cooler bag. In fact there might be something in the fridge. I told the cleaners to stock the fridge with drinks so they'll be cold when we get here.

Ellen: There won't be any wine in that fridge. No cleaner would be that thoughtful. They probably don't even speak English.

Belinda: This isn't Auckland, Mum, it's the country. Everyone speaks English in the country.

Ellen: You ever been up north?

Belinda: I told the woman at the cleaning company to buy the drinks and charge it to the account. Just have a look in the fridge.

Ellen: I'll bet you anything that that fridge is empty. (*Opens the fridge. Pulls out a bottle of wine.*) Well, there's a surprise.

Belinda: I told you. You owe someone an apology.

Ellen: We pay them don't we?

Belinda: Barely. Rachel hasn't sent the charter through. (*She gets out her iPhone.*) No text messages either.

Ellen: I'm sure we can cope without dispatches from Auckland.

Belinda: Yes, I must put away my devices. I'm as bad as a teenager. I'm here to get away from everything.

Ellen: So you keep saying. And yet you're still staring at a screen. Two screens in fact.

Belinda: You're right; these things go away. Right after I check Facebook.

Ellen: Belinda.

Belinda: Okay, okay. (*Puts away Mac and iPhone.*) I feel so isolated. But that's a good thing. Time to refocus.

Ellen: (*Examines wine bottle.*) Good God, it's not even a vintage, or a reserve. I guess I can force it down while I wait for the real wine to cool.

*BELINDA looks over at ELLEN.*

Ellen: Don't give me that look, Belinda.

Belinda: It's only two o'clock.

Ellen: We're on holiday. And anyway, it's a perfectly decent time for a glass of wine, even if the help wouldn't recognise a decent wine if it socked them right in the eye. And I guess I'll have to force down these smoked oysters as well. (*Gets the can of smoked oysters out of the fridge.*)

Belinda: Just don't overdo it.

Ellen: You're a fine one to talk. And considering the company that will be arriving soon, we'll both need this bottle.

Belinda: Mum, please.

Ellen: What?

Belinda: You know what.

Ellen: When is your father and Abigail turning up?

Belinda: Soon. And please behave.

Ellen: It's not me you should be worried about. That daughter of yours is a cyclone. In fact, weather forecasters should put out warnings whenever she's in the vicinity. Batten down the hatches, expect tantrums, drama and indulgent self loathing.

Belinda: Be nice, Mum. And especially with Dad. It is his birthday.

Ellen: How could I forget the day that brought one of the most wretched men into existence?

Belinda: I know you don't mean that. You can both be civil to each other when you want to be. Come on, Mum, it's not often we all get together.

Ellen: There's a very good reason for that. And what's the latest on your husband?

Belinda: David's been held up with one of his clients in Auckland. He'll drive over when he gets the chance.

Ellen: And your errant son?

Belinda: I think Jarvis is hitchhiking over, or that's what he said.

Ellen: Hitchhiking? You have to be joking.

Belinda: Just leave it, please.

Ellen: What on Earth is he trying to prove? It's no wonder I'm hitting the bottle with that mob about to arrive. Hitchhiking? Good God.

Belinda: Don't start. I am telling you now. Please don't just sit there this whole weekend drinking wine and throwing jibes at your family, okay? I didn't bring you here to do that.

Ellen: Oh, but you brought me here didn't you? Like a little pet that might be naughty and soil the carpet in the corner.

Belinda: That's not what I meant.

Ellen: That's exactly what you meant. I do have other things I could be doing. I'm not reliant on you for a life.

Belinda: I never said that.

Ellen: You've always got to be in control don't you?

Belinda: Great, you've started already. I am your ally okay? I stick up for you.

Ellen: I don't need your help.

Belinda: Yes you do, Mum, yes you do. And I am sick and tired of being a buffer between you and everyone else in this family.

Ellen: Oh, here we go.

Belinda: Yes, here we go. And just once, just once, I'd like to have a nice weekend where I don't have to keep my warring family apart. So can you just do me one simple favour and keep your mouth shut unless you've got something nice to say.

Ellen: Why do you force this family together?

Belinda: Because we're a family, and families need to have family occasions.

Ellen: It only causes you stress. Why don't you just give up?

Belinda: Because I don't want to give up, Mum. Because this family means the world to me, and it stresses me when we don't get along. And I just know that if we spend more time in each other's company we'll get along better.

Ellen: You don't seriously believe that do you?

Belinda: Of course I do, because I'm an optimist, not a cynic like you.

Ellen: You need something more in your life than just family and charity. You need something for yourself.

Belinda: I know exactly what I need. But what I don't need is a mother constantly getting on my back.

Ellen: (*Pours two glasses.*) Do you want a glass of wine or not?

Belinda: Yes, thank you.

Ellen: You get so worked up don't you? You've always been like this. Even when you were a girl you used to...

Belinda: Yeah, I know what I used to do when I was a girl. I was there wasn't I?

Ellen: Unfortunately so were the rest of us. I can see where Abigail gets it from. The poor girl never had a chance.

Belinda: Take your glass of wine and go and sit down.

Ellen: I'm not your little puppy, I don't have to do what you...

Belinda: Mum, take your wine and your smoked oysters and sit down while I put the groceries away.

Ellen: No, I'm not going to...

Belinda: Go and sit down.

Ellen: But...

Belinda: Sit ... down ... now!

Ellen: Yes, Mummy.

*ELLEN sits down with her glass and a can of smoked oysters. BELINDA drinks her wine in one go, and then pours herself another glass. She starts putting the groceries away.*

Ellen: So who's this client David is seeing? On a Saturday.

Belinda: I know what day it is. I wonder if we brought enough meat for the barbecue.

Ellen: There's plenty there. Besides, I'm not even sure if David will show.

Belinda: He'll show.

Ellen: Your dogged loyalty is truly touching.

Belinda: Right. We'll sort this one out. (*Phones her husband.*)

Ellen: You're wasting your time.

Belinda: (*Talking into phone.*) Hello, David. Yes. We've just arrived. How's work going? Oh? Well, how long will that be? Can you catch a flight over? Okay, I guess... Yes, I know, but... well you ring me when you can. Everyone will be here. Yes. Bye, David. Love you.

Ellen: Doesn't sound promising.

Belinda: He's still with a client. It's taking a bit longer than anticipated. But he'll try and make it over before the barbecue tonight.

Ellen: Doesn't sound promising.

Belinda: Please don't be negative. David knows how important this is for me.

Ellen: That's never made a difference before.

Belinda: Shut up.

Ellen: What does your life coach have to say about useless husbands?

Belinda: I'm not even going to answer that.

*BELINDA finishes putting away the groceries, puts a bottle of wine in the freezer and sits down with her mother.*

Belinda: (*Lifts her glass.*) To a nice relaxing weekend by the beach, and getting back to basics.

Ellen: To a nice weekend. (*They both drink.*) Hmm, the finish is a bit tart.

Belinda: I think it adds an agreeable tang. I wonder if they put a citrus in it. I'm sure I'm getting citrus undertones.

Ellen: It's probably the anti-freeze. You never can tell with these Hawkes Bay vineyards. Oh well, at least it goes with these tinny oysters. Want one?

Belinda: (*Eats an oyster.*) Now, I want us to be positive. If we think positive things, then positive things will happen.

Ellen: Not more pointless life coach drivel.

Belinda: It works.

Ellen: Have you ever heard of the placebo effect? And you've never explained what a life coach actually is. It's not even a proper job. People just make up jobs nowadays. If they're stuck for a career, they just invent a job and fools come along and part with their money. Life coach. For goodness sakes.

Belinda: Are you about finished?

Ellen: So why is it that the men in your life want to stay away from you as much as possible?

Belinda: I'll go and get the rest of the bags from the car.

Ellen: All I'm saying is where's David? And where's Jarvis? And where's your father? They're not exactly stampeding to the door are they?

*BELINDA exits.*

Ellen: You might want to think about that. I know I do. (*Sips her wine and looks around.*) What a complete shambles. (*Sips her wine. Burps.*) Oh, that's much better. (*Eats an oyster.*) These will probably give me the farts.

*BELINDA comes back in with the other bags. ELLEN talks to her while she puts the bags in the bedroom.*

Ellen: So has that daughter of yours got a man yet?

Belinda: She has a name, Mum. And she is your granddaughter. This is your family as well.

Ellen: That's not a fact I like to dwell on. I haven't seen her for months. She's still fat I suppose?

Belinda: That's got nothing to do with it. And she's trying to get thinner.

Ellen: Yeah, and I'm trying to get Sean Connery. Seems to me she...

Belinda: I don't care, Mum. I really don't care what it seems to you.

Ellen: So she's driving your father over is she?

Belinda: Yes.

Ellen: I doubt if either one of them will get through that trip alive.

Belinda: Well there might be something in that. I hope they aren't bickering already.

Ellen: Woops!

Belinda: What?

Ellen: Can you hear that?

Belinda: Hear what?

Ellen: I think they have arrived.

Abigail: (*From offstage.*) You stupid old man.

Arthur: (*From offstage.*) Can't you shut up for one second? One second. That's all I ask.

*ABIGAIL and ARTHUR enter carrying luggage. ABIGAIL is a twenty-five-year-old woman of a generous aspect. ARTHUR is an eighty-five-year-old man. He has a bad leg and walks with a cane.*

Abigail: Hello, Mum. Hello, Grandma. I'm sure this derelict belongs to one of you.

Arthur: Couldn't even stop to let me go to the toilet.

Abigail: I stopped three times. Three times. One, two, three.

Arthur: I know what three is. And I needed to go again.

Abigail: Well, I just got a little sick of stopping to let you piss on the side of the road for every passing motorist to see.

Arthur: That wasn't your problem.

Ellen: There's some average wine here if you want it. We've just opened a bottle.

Abigail: If you want to go to the toilet so bad then why aren't you going now?

Arthur: I am going. If that's okay with you, princess?

Abigail: It's perfectly fine with me.

*ARTHUR exits to the toilet.*

Abigail: What a complete nightmare that trip was. That's definitely the last time I'm driving that man anywhere. (*Pours herself a wine.*)

Belinda: Well, you're here now.

Abigail: Obviously.

Belinda: I'm just trying to...

Abigail: Yeah, I know what you were just trying to do, Mum. Where's Dad?

Belinda: He said he will fly over later today. He's still got some work on back home.

Abigail: What, has he actually found some money he hasn't been able to get his hands on yet?

Belinda: He works hard.

Abigail: No, people who clean toilets forty hours a week work hard. Dad just sits around in a suit drinking craft beers and talking about how to rip people off.

Ellen: Who paid for your education, dear?

Abigail: I hope he gets here. I haven't seen him in ages.

Ellen: This is the man you were disparaging a few seconds ago.

Abigail: I wasn't disparaging. He's my dad and I would like to see him once in a while. And where's Jarvis?

Belinda: He said he was hitching over.

Abigail: Oh my God.

Belinda: It's a phase. He'll get through it.

Abigail: Yeah, and one day he might even go to university. Or, shock horror, get a job. The finish on this wine is a bit tart.

Belinda: It's citrus, I think.

Abigail: Probably the battery acid. Hawkes Bay is it? Couldn't you find a cheaper wine?

Ellen: The cleaners stocked the fridge.

Abigail: Well, there's your answer.

Ellen: The good stuff is cooling in the freezer.

Abigail: I'm going to call Dad.

Ellen: He won't answer.

Belinda: I've just called him.

Abigail: Well, I want to call him and talk to him myself. (*Takes out her phone.*)

Ellen: He won't answer.

Abigail: We'll see about that.

*ABIGAIL pushes the numbers on the phone.*

Ellen: (*Takes money out of her purse.*) I've got fifty dollars here says David will not answer that call.

Belinda: Mum, don't be ridiculous.

Ellen: Come on, who wants to take my money from me? Fifty dollars. David is not going to answer that call. Where's your sporting blood? I'll even offer three to one odds.

Belinda: No one is going to take your bet.

Ellen: Because you both know I'm right.

Abigail: Shut up, it's ringing. (*She listens and then puts the phone away.*) Voice mail.

Ellen: (*Puts her money away.*) Pity I had no takers. But it's not so much the money, rather the satisfaction that I was right.

Abigail: He's probably busy.

Ellen: Your mother rang him about three minutes ago and he wasn't busy then.

Belinda: Mum! Can't you leave it alone?

Abigail: Oh, I get the picture. He talks to you but suddenly he's too busy to talk to his own daughter?

Belinda: He probably just assumed that I would have told you what he told me, so he didn't want you to waste your money on the call.

Ellen: Isn't that thoughtful of him.

Abigail: Did he know I was here with you?

Belinda: Um, yes I'm sure I mentioned it.

Abigail: You're a terrible liar, Mum. God Dad's a bastard.

Belinda: Don't say that.

Ellen: We're back to disparaging him now are we?

Abigail: Why is it that I'm always the one who has to drive Granddad over here?

Ellen: While we're on the subject.

Belinda: We're not starting on that are we?

Abigail: Yes, we are starting on that. It's always me.

Belinda: You always volunteer.

Abigail: Because nobody else will.

Ellen: Do you know what 'hubris' means, Abigail?

Abigail: No, but I'll look it up on Mum's Mac because I know you're insulting me. (*Walks over to the computer.*)

Ellen: Don't bother, I can tell you.

Abigail: No, I want to find out myself.

Ellen: I can tell you.

Abigail: No, I'm doing it myself, okay?

Ellen: You might want to look up 'irony' while you're at it.

Abigail: I'm not going to play your games, Grandma. (*Walks away from the computer.*)

Ellen: What games? I'm just laughing at you making an arse of yourself. And speaking of arses...

Belinda: Mum!

Abigail: No, let the old woman speak her mind. You got a problem with my arse?

Ellen: All I'm saying is a little exercise wouldn't go amiss. You do know what exercise is, don't you?

Belinda: Mum, I told you not to start. We've been through this.

Abigail: No, let her say what she wants. In fact, you can comment on my big fat arse all you like. Here, have a closer look.

*ABIGAIL walks over and thrusts her posterior in ELLEN'S face.*

Abigail: There, how's that? Have a good close look. You got something more to say about it?

Belinda: Abbey, where's the dignity in that?

Ellen: Can you get your bum out of my face?

Abigail: What, is this making you uncomfortable?

Ellen: It's blocking out the sun.

*ARTHUR walks in.*

Arthur: Now, there's a pleasant sight.

*ABIGAIL goes back to her wine.*

Ellen: All I'm saying is that you would be an attractive young woman if you'd just lose a bit of weight.

Abigail: If I had a dollar, Grandma, if I had a dollar.

Arthur: Is there anything to drink in this place?

Ellen: There's orange juice and sparkling water and...

Arthur: I said, is there anything to drink?

Belinda: Why is it that the first thing anyone in this family does when they get to the beach house is head straight for the booze?

Arthur: I don't know. You tell me.

Abigail: We're drinking Sav. Average, but it'll do until...

Arthur: I don't want to drink women's booze. Is there any beer in the fridge?

Ellen: Yes.

Arthur: Hello, Ellen.

Ellen: Arty.

Arthur: Nice of you to come over.

Ellen: You almost sounded as if you meant that.

*ABIGAIL gets ARTHUR a beer.*

Abigail: Here.

Arthur: Thanks. Is there a bottle opener around or am I expected to unscrew it with my teeth?

Abigail: It's a twist off, you fool. And you haven't got any teeth.

Belinda: Abbey.

Ellen: How's work, Abbey? You still at that law firm?

Abigail: Yes. I've just been made team leader.

Arthur: God help the people under you.

Abigail: Another day, Granddad, I might bite. But I'm just too tired today. I've spent all week looking at houses.

Belinda: So you're going to buy?

Abigail: If I can find the right house. God I'm sick of flatmates. No matter where I live, I always run into idiotic flatmates.

Arthur: Yeah, funny that.

Abigail: I suppose no one is going to reimburse me for the petrol as usual.

Arthur: What?

Abigail: It takes money to transport invalids.

Belinda: Abigail.

Arthur: If you want petrol money, I can give you petrol money. I do have money, you know. You should have said something earlier.

Abigail: I don't want your money.

Arthur: No, I'm going to give you money. (*Gets out his wallet.*) How much do you want?

Abigail: I don't want it, I told you.

Arthur: Twenty dollars? Thirty?

Abigail: No. Nothing.

Arthur: Forty? How's forty sound? Here's forty.

Abigail: I don't want it, you stupid old man.

Arthur: So why did you bring it up?

Abigail: All I'm saying is that it costs money to run a car, and it's always me who has to taxi you to places.

Arthur: Oh, so you do want money? Are we going to go through this again? How much do you want?

Abigail: I said I don't want your money!

Belinda: For goodness sake, you two. Inside voices, please.

Arthur: We would have gotten better mileage out of that car if we weren't carrying so much weight.

Abigail: Thanks for the cheap shot.

Arthur: I was talking about all your luggage.

Abigail: Yeah right.

Arthur: And your fat bum.

Belinda: Dad!

Abigail: You pathetic old cripple. So that's what this has already come to? Have a cheap shot at Abbey's weight, eh? Grandma's had a go, Granddad's had a go. Mum? You got anything to add? You wanna get in a zinger while the going's good?

Belinda: Abbey, please don't take offence. You know what your grandparents are like, they're only teasing.

Ellen: Ever get the feeling you're not in the room, Arty?

Belinda: I am just trying to make the peace. Can we all at least try and make this a nice occasion for Dad's birthday? Okay?

Abigail: And I have lost weight you know. Four kilos this year.

Arthur: (*Looks her up and down.*) I doubt if your poor car noticed the difference.

*ABIGAIL, simmering with rage, drinks the rest of her wine in one go.*

Abigail: Did they even use grapes in this shit? Where's the decent wine?

Belinda: In the freezer cooling.

*ABIGAIL gets out the bottle and pours herself a glass.*

Abigail: I've had about enough of everyone for a while. I'm going for a walk down to the beach.

Belinda: You don't have to go by yourself. Wait for us to finish our drinks and we can all go.

Abigail: You don't get it, Mum. I want to be by myself for a few minutes. I can't stand being around that geriatric for one second longer. So excuse me, everyone.

Arthur: When you get to the water's edge, don't stop.

Abigail: Fuck you, Granddad.

Belinda: Abigail Gibson! I don't care what the provocation, please do not use language like that. And I don't want you talking to your grandfather like that in this...

*ABIGAIL leaves.*

Ellen: Don't bother, Belinda, she's gone. As respectful to you as always.

Arthur: You never used to hear young women talk like that.

Ellen: There never used to be any young women like her.

Belinda: You wind her up, Dad. A grandfather and his granddaughter shouldn't talk to each other like that.

Ellen: Well, everything's going to schedule so far. We're one down inside half an hour.

Arthur: What kind of beer is this?

Belinda: Maybe this whole weekend is a big mistake. You are just going to be at Abigail the whole time aren't you? Poor girl. She's trying her best. You bully her, Dad, you really do.

Arthur: Oh, that is very rich coming from you. Nowadays you're very interested in her welfare.

Belinda: What's that supposed to mean?

Arthur: You know very well what it means.

Ellen: Are you going to bring that up, Arthur? Because if you so much as breathe any of that history then I'm leaving. I don't care if I have to follow Jarvis's example and hitch a ride, I am leaving.

Belinda: Mum, Dad won't say anything, will he?

Arthur: Well, if I'm accused I'm bullying the poor girl then maybe I have to defend myself. Maybe I have to tell her what I did for her.

Ellen: Right, I'm going. Where did you put my bags, Belinda?

Belinda: You have nowhere to go.

Ellen: I don't care. I am serious, Belinda. I am going. I am not having that man thinking he can blackmail me.

Belinda: No one is blackmailing anyone. Dad, tell Mum you won't talk about what happened.

Arthur: If she wants to go...

Belinda: Dad, please. Everyone has come over here to celebrate your birthday.

Ellen: Except David.

Belinda: He will be here soon. Dad, please don't say anything silly. The past is the past.

Arthur: Okay. I wasn't going to bring it up anyway.

Ellen: Not good enough, I'm still leaving.

Belinda: Mum, don't be contrary. Dad's said he isn't going to say anything. Dad, why are you even talking about this?

Arthur: The conversation moved in the topic's direction.

Belinda: No it didn't. It was deliberate. Why now? What's happened?

Ellen: This conversation has got to stop right now or I'm leaving.

Arthur: You keep saying that, but you're still sitting down, Ellen.

Ellen: You want to try me, Arthur?

Belinda: We're not going to say anything more about it. Okay, Dad?

Arthur: Fine by me.

Belinda: Good. That's settled. God I need another drink. (*Looks at her watch.*) We haven't even been here half an hour. This family is exhausting. (*Pours herself another wine.*)

Ellen: You need to relax, Belinda.

Belinda: That's not easy to do around here.

Arthur: Well, that was a bit of excitement. What on Earth is this beer? Tastes fruity, like something a sissy would drink.

*JARVIS walks in texting. JARVIS is a nineteen-year-old man, dressed in a studied bedraggled way. He's got a backpack.*

Jarvis: Hey, guys.

Belinda: Jarvis! It's good to see you.

*BELINDA hugs her son while he continues to text.*

Ellen: Hello, young man.

Arthur: Jarvis.

Jarvis: Why do you guys look like you've just been to a funeral?

Ellen: Oh, it's just the usual scene. Accusation, counter accusation and family intrigue.

Jarvis: Don't tell me, you've pissed off Abbey and she's gone out for a walk?

Ellen: Got it in one.

Jarvis: She must be really angry. She never walks for fun.

Belinda: So how was the hitching?

Jarvis: Cool, scored a ride with this awesome German girl. Got her phone number too. She's staying close by. Fingers crossed, people.

Belinda: Aren't you going out with someone? That Fern girl?

Jervis: Spread the love, Mum. Anyway, I'm texting her now.

Belinda: Who, the German, or your girlfriend?

Jervis: That's a good point. Who am I texting? (*Looks at his phone.*) No, it's Fern.

Arthur: You don't give the barber much business do you, Jarvis?

Jarvis: Just enjoying my hair while I still have it, Granddad.

Belinda: It wouldn't kill you to get a haircut would it?

Ellen: It would be nice to be presentable at a job interview. That's assuming you're looking.

Jarvis: Could you all just quit it? No wonder Abbey's buggered off. I don't have to be here you know.

Belinda: It's nice you made it over. It really is. I appreciate it.

Ellen: Yes, we're all in your debt that you grace us with your divine presence.

Jarvis: Sarcasm noted, Grandma.

Arthur: Do you want a beer?

Jarvis: No thanks, I've got my own drink. (*Pulls out a bottle of cheap port in a brown paper bag from his backpack.*)

Ellen: What is that muck?

Jarvis: Gut rot port. I was drinking it on the way over.

Ellen: You know, you're not poor. You can afford proper drink. Look, he's even got it in a brown paper bag.

Jarvis: You're right, Grandma, maybe I should hide my alcoholism behind a vintage Sauvignon Blanc.

Ellen: Cheeky little bugger.

Belinda: I think that we should all follow Abbey's example and go for a walk. We need to get out of this house for a bit.

Arthur: We've only just got here.

Belinda: And it speaks volumes about this family that we need to get out of here.

Jarvis: You guys go ahead. Fern will be coming around soon.

Ellen: And I'm comfortable sitting here.

Belinda: I really think it would be better if we all got some air.

Ellen: There's air in here.

Jarvis: Mum's right. All of us packed into this lounge is a catastrophe waiting to happen. I could feel the tension in the room when I walked in.

Belinda: It's not that bad.

Jarvis: Are you kidding? The atmosphere in here is like a landmine waiting for a tank.

*ABIGAIL walks in.*

Jarvis: And here's the tank.

Abigail: What?

Jarvis: Hello, Abbey.

Abigail: Jarvis.

Belinda: You weren't long.

Abigail: Do I look like I enjoy walking? Besides, I've seen it all before.

Belinda: We were going to go out and find you.

Abigail: Why? What for?

Ellen: We just wanted to go for a walk with you. You don't need to get so defensive.

Abigail: I do around here.

Belinda: We didn't think you'd be back so soon, that's all.

Abigail: Were you talking about me?

Arthur: Did you get hungry? It must be at least an hour since you had that bag of potato chips.

Abigail: Just go for a walk, old man. And I shared that bag with you, you ungrateful sod.

Belinda: Come on, let's go. Bring your drinks if you want, but let's just go.

Arthur: Okay, quit nagging, woman.

Ellen: It's no use resisting, Arty. You know what she's like. Always has to be in control.

Belinda: Now I'm feeling like I'm not in the room. Come on, everybody. See you later, kids. We'll be back soon.

*BELINDA, ELLEN and ARTHUR leave.*

Abigail: Kids? Who is she calling kids? I bet ya they were talking about me. I just couldn't stand walking around out there knowing they'd be talking about me. I bet you that's why they left in such a hurry. So they could finish talking about me.

Jarvis: Is that seriously what you think?

Abigail: Yes. (*Pours herself another wine.*) You know, I have lost weight. I am making progress. And Granddad had most of those chips. I had to eat something. It's a long way over here.

*JARVIS pulls a book out of his backpack. He starts texting again. He takes a sip from his bottle.*

Abigail: What the hell are you drinking?

Jarvis: Port. Ten dollars a bottle. You can't do better than that.

Abigail: Bloody hell. And I suppose that vile drink matches the stuff drunk by the great Jack Kerouac and company.

*JARVIS ignores her baiting and continues to text.*

Abigail: You know, you're not poor. You don't have to hitchhike. And you are not Jack Kerouac. What, have you got your little poems in your backpack? Or maybe some autobiographical writing? Little thoughts about society? Your views on the world? A journal where you write down your road travelling experiences? A bit of pseudo-religious philosophy? I'm sure all the little girls are very impressed. Are they beating a path to your literary door? God, you are such a fake. You have money you know. Your family's loaded. Do all the little girls know that?

Jarvis: Just fuck up, ya fat cow. God, can't you just shut up? I'm trying to text.

Abigail: Well, I'm a real person in this room. Try talking to me.

Jarvis: Why?

Abigail: Who are you texting?

Jarvis: This German girl who gave me a ride over. Or is it Fern? I've lost track. Anyway, as long as someone with nice tits walks through that door, I'm happy.

Abigail: Oh, how romantic.

Jarvis: Hey, I'm nineteen, what are they expecting? A marriage proposal?

Abigail: I wonder if Mum brought anything good to eat. (*Goes to the kitchen and hunts for food.*) Nice, potato chips. (*Opens bag.*)

Jarvis: How's that diet coming along?

Abigail: Fuck off, I'm on holiday. Want one?

Jarvis: No thanks.

Abigail: Well aren't you Mr Control. And what are you reading? On The Road? (*Looks at his book.*) No, The Dharma Bums. Even better, a book where your hero tries to use Buddhism to justify his misogyny.

Jarvis: You've read it have you?

Abigail: I was once an idiot teenager myself. But I outgrew being a teenager.

Jarvis: You outgrew a lot of things.

Abigail: Come come, let us not argue, we're brother and sister, you know?

Jarvis: Nice Jane Austen tie in.

Abigail: So you do read proper books then. You know, you could have gotten a ride with me and Granddad.

Jarvis: You've gotta be kidding me. I'd rather get a ride with Donald Trump and Lena Dunham.

Abigail: It wasn't quite that bad.

Jarvis: Where's Dad anyway?

Abigail: He said he had to meet with a client today. He'll be over later.

Jarvis: Oh yeh, and what blonde bimbo client is this?

Abigail: Don't know, but I'm sure it's someone with large assets and a nice bottom line.

Jarvis: Do you think Mum knows? Do you think she even suspects?

Abigail: Look, I love Mum, but she's so fucking stupid it's depressing.

Jarvis: I don't wanna be around when that truth gets out.

Abigail: It's not even as if Dad's that discreet about it.

Jarvis: Doesn't it piss you off that Dad would rather get his leg over some nameless slut than spend time with us?

Abigail: I'm used to it. That man pays very little attention to me at the best of times. Remember when we were kids and he used to just give us a fifty and send us off to the

movies with our friends? He still does that. I rang him up last week in a wildly optimistic mood to talk about this weekend. He actually asked if I needed any money.

Jarvis: That's his definition of love, reaching for his wallet.

Abigail: But we take it don't we?

Jarvis: The money or the neglect?

Abigail: Both. I feel like some chocolate. (*Goes back to the kitchen.*)

Jarvis: So what's been going on here?

Abigail: Just the usual.

Jarvis: I was afraid of that.

Abigail: None of us are going to make it through this weekend. Not with our sanity intact anyway.

Jarvis: I don't think many of us have our sanity anyway.

*ABIGAIL picks up a framed photo from the kitchen bench and looks at it.*

Abigail: What a nice family photo. It's almost like we care about each other. It's amazing what lies a good photographer can tell. (*Puts down photo.*)

Jarvis: Don't you ever wonder about this family?

Abigail: I wonder about it all the time. I can't believe Mum didn't bring any chocolate. I've been good all week. I need a reward. You know we do have some nice Sauvignon Blanc here. You don't have to drink that bile.

Jarvis: Any red?

Abigail: No.

Jarvis: I only do red. I mean, seriously, think about it, we all came over from Auckland but none of us can stand to be in the same car together, so we have to come separately. Dad can't even be bothered to be with us; he'd rather be with his latest tart. Grandma and Granddad are going to be at each other's throats all weekend. They are happily divorced and yet they insist on getting together with each other every time Mum makes us celebrate a birthday. You know this isn't a normal family.

Abigail: I realise that. Why would that woman not bring any chocolate?

Jarvis: Why didn't you bring any?

Abigail: Because I'm on a diet, I don't buy chocolate.

Jarvis: So anyway, here we all are. You ever wondered why that is? With so many things driving this family apart, what do you think actually holds us together? And don't say something corny like love because that ain't it.

*ABIGAIL sits back down next to JARVIS.*

Abigail: Why are you here?

Jarvis: Good road trip, and Fern's over here. She's a great fuck. Yep, it's sex on the beach for me tonight.

Abigail: Spare me the details.

Jarvis: (*Offers ABIGAIL the bottle.*) Wanna a sip?

Abigail: Please. I'd rather lick your armpits.

Jarvis: I had a girl that liked to do that. Crazy bitch.

Abigail: Don't call women bitches. You know, I can't help but think that you think you know something that I don't.

Jarvis: About the armpit licking girl?

Abigail: No, about our family. You come in here very brash and smug and bring up our family, a topic you've always been very reluctant to talk about.

Jarvis: It just so happens I did pick up a little nugget of information from the annals of the Gibson family history. A couple of weeks ago I had a very interesting discussion with Granddad.

Abigail: Oh yeah, and what did that old fool have to say for himself?

Jarvis: Quite a lot actually. And I wouldn't be so harsh on him if I were you.

Abigail: Why? What's that old bugger done for me?

Jarvis: More than you think.

Abigail: Some cryptic musings on your part are not going to get me to be nicer to the old man. And what were you doing talking to him anyway?

Jarvis: I don't know, just thought I'd go along to his place.

Abigail: Don't tell me, some Kerouac inspired quest to seek the knowledge of the elderly? You're wasting your time with that senile fool. You won't find any knowledge there.

Jarvis: It's amazing what people say with a few drinks in them.

Abigail: Well, I think you're full of shit.

Jarvis: Think what you want. But if you want to know what keeps everyone together, it's guilt. Something major went down back in the day and now everyone is keeping tabs over everyone else.

Abigail: If you're not going to say anything directly then don't bother...

*A knock on the door.*

Abigail: Who would that be? Not a Jehovah's Witness? In Pauanui? Right, I'm going to give them a piece of my mind. I'm just looking for someone to yell at.

Jarvis: Relax, tough guy, it's probably just Fern.

Abigail: She got here quick.

Jarvis: She's staying just around the corner.

Abigail: It's still quick. She must be desperate. Just your type.

Jarvis: I like to think it's my natural charm.

Abigail: And I like to think I've got a body like Jennifer Lawrence.

*Another knock at the door.*

Abigail: Well answer it.

Jarvis: You know nothing about girlfriend management. You've got to build the anticipation.

Abigail: Yeah, like you're worth anticipating.

*JARVIS walks to the door and opens it.*

Jarvis: Hi, Fern, come in.

*FERN walks in. FERN is a twenty-year-old woman, wearing studied alternative clothes. She speaks with an affected thoughtfulness.*

Fern: Hey, Jarvis. Good trip over?

Jarvis: Yeah, just got a ride with this farmer for most of the way. This is my sister Abigail. Abbey, this is Fern.

Abigail: Nice to meet you, Fern.

Fern: Yeah, cool. So ... is it Abigail or Abbey?

Abigail: Abbey is fine.

Fern: Yeah ... cool.

Jarvis: Help yourself to a drink, man.

Abigail: He's very good at giving away other people's drinks.

Fern: So ... what? Is this cool ... not cool?

Abigail: It's cool.

Fern: Right ... don't want to upset people, you know ... distort the scenario.

Abigail: Distort the what?

Jarvis: It's fine, have a drink if you want.

Fern: I can't stay ... you know ... for long.

Jarvis: Why not?

Fern: Me and some of the girls, Rachel, Becky... you know Becky, the one with the cool hat? Well, Rachel and Becky and that are going round to Kate's for drinks, you know? You wanna come?

Jarvis: Yeah, why not. We going now?

Fern: It's interesting ... I mean we could ... but Kate just ... you know ... I'd rather go as a team? You understand?

Jarvis: Yeah, I understand.

Abigail: I left a bag out in the car. I'm going to grab it while I remember. Help yourself to that wine on the bench.

*ABIGAIL leaves.*

Fern: She's not as fat as you said, Jarvis. I was expecting someone more ... dominating.

Jarvis: She's fat enough. And don't worry, she dominates.

Fern: She's got great boobs ... you know.

Jarvis: I don't pay much attention to that.

Fern: So she's the one? With that whole thing with her Granddad and your Mum?

Jarvis: Yeah, but she doesn't know.

Fern: So ... you know ... consequences and ... repercussions.

Jarvis: Something like that.

Fern: It's really good you came over. I mean ... things have been a bit uncool recently. Sorry about ... back in Auckland. Things got ... distressed. I'm not usually like that. I'm usually more settled. It won't ... happen again. I'm cool now.

Jarvis: Yeah, whatever.

Fern: I like you and ... I don't want to threaten that with foolish behaviour.

Jarvis: It's just that I can't have someone in my ear telling me how to live my life. I get that enough with my family.

Fern: I understand ... totally.

Jarvis: Do you? That's all I'm saying, Fern. You gotta ease up on that shit. If we wanna make something of this, then you gotta stop commentating on my life.

Fern: Commentating on your life. Okay ... cool ... I totally understand. You know ... I really like you. You're the best guy ... you know ... I've ever had.

Jarvis: Just give me my space, man, that's all I ask.