

SIGN OF LIFE

A PLAY BY MARK A. RIDGE

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SIGN OF LIFE was originally produced under the title of KILLING KITTENS.

The first closed door reading of the play took place in Chicago, IL and featured the talents of Patrick Gannon, Amanda Besinger, Colin Sphar and Aaron Page.

A staged reading of the play was produced by La Strada Ensemble Theatre in New Jersey. It was featured as part of the Pride Month Rainbow Reading Series and was directed by A.J. Ciccotelli. It featured the following cast: Thomas Ryan Ward, Lisa Siano, Patrick Dean and W. Allen Wrede.

The first full production of the play took place at Theatre on the Square in Indianapolis, IN and was directed by Juli Inskeep. It featured the following cast: Thomas Turner, Shannon Samson, Nick Heskett and John Fullam.



CAST OF CHARACTERS

ARCHER: Archer is a sweet, charming, attractive man somewhere between mid-thirties and mid-fifties, who suffers from a borderline personality disorder. He is intelligent and a little on the reserved side. Although he does his best to suppress it, there is an air of sadness about him.

AILEEN: Aileen is Archer's best friend and around the same age. She is boisterous, outgoing and speaks with a slight southern accent.

JOSHUA: Joshua Robinson (J.R.) is Archer's uninhibited, good looking, young, upstairs neighbor. He has an incredible body. Although he has been "Around the block," he still manages to maintain a sweet, gentle disposition.

RADIO DISC JOCKEY, TIM and BRIAN: These are all Off Stage Voices and can be pre-recorded.

CASTING NOTE: Joshua should be approximately 15-20 years younger than Archer. Depending on the actor cast as Archer, care should be taken to insure that Joshua does not appear to be a minor.

LOCATION

The play takes place on New Year's Eve in the living room/kitchen area of Archer's Chicago apartment.

Act I

Scene One Early Evening – Around 6:30 p.m.
Scene Two Later that same evening – Around 9 p.m.

Act 2

Scene One Later that night – Around 11:15 p.m.
Scene Two Early the next morning – Around 4 a.m.

ACT ONE
SCENE ONE

A CHRISTMAS SONG is playing on the radio. As the song ends, the VOICE OF A DISC JOCKEY is heard.

RADIO D.J.

(On the radio) Hello Chicago. You've got your radio tuned to WKQD and this is the Chris Cullerton show. It's just past six thirty on this brisk New Year's Eve and the studio thermometer says twenty two degrees. If you're heading out to one of those fabulous New Year's Eve parties, remember to bundle up. The snow is expected to move out of the area by midnight, but it's still pretty messy out there. If you have to drive, please drive carefully. We now continue our last night of all holiday music with this seasonal favorite.

Another SONG begins to play. The stage lights come up. We are in the living room/kitchen area of a typical, middle class Chicago condominium. The kitchen, complete with stove and refrigerator is located near the front door. A small dining table and two chairs are located nearby. A hallway leads off to the bedroom and the bathroom and a glass sliding door leads out onto a balcony. The room's furnishings include a sofa and matching chairs, a coffee table and a small entertainment center. A camera on a tripod and a photographer's backdrop are propped up in the corner.

After a few moments, smoke begins to fill the kitchen. It is coming from the stove. The SMOKE DETECTOR SOUNDS and ARCHER rushes into the room. He is fresh from the shower and dressed in his bathrobe.

ARCHER

Shit. Shit. Shit. *(ARCHER opens the oven to let the smoke escape. Grabbing a cookie sheet, he rushes to the sliding door, opens it and fans the air until the SMOKE DETECTOR BEEPING stops. He opens the front door and yells out to his neighbors.)* False alarm. Everything's under control. Everything's fine. There's no fire. Sorry. *(ARCHER returns to the kitchen and removes the tray of burnt food from the oven. Realizing that the food can't be salvaged, he tosses it into the sink.)* Fuck! *(Archer picks up the cookie sheet and violently smashes it into his forehead.)* God Dammit!!

(ARCHER tosses the tray onto the counter and returns to the bedroom to finish dressing. After a moment, KNOCKING can be heard at the front door and the SOUND OF KEYS TURNING. The front door opens and AILEEN peeks in.)

AILEEN

(Yelling) Hello? Hello? Archer? *(AILEEN enters the apartment carrying a grocery bag and a change of clothes. She is dressed in the uniform of a discount department store employee. She places the groceries on the counter and returns to the living room to turn off the radio.)* Arch are you here?

ARCHER

(Off Stage) What?

AILEEN

It's me, Aileen. I let myself in.

ARCHER

(Off Stage) Aileen? Don't come in here. I'm not dressed.

AILEEN

I've seen you naked before. It's no big deal.

ARCHER

(Off Stage) Thanks.

AILEEN

It smells like something's burnin'. You want me to check?

ARCHER

(Off Stage) You're too late.

AILEEN

I'm starvin'. What are we havin'?

ARCHER

(Off Stage) What did you bring?

AILEEN

Salad.

ARCHER

(Off Stage) We're having salad.

AILEEN

Salad is not a meal. It's a course.

ARCHER

(Off Stage) A lot of people eat salad as a meal.

AILEEN

Well, I'm not one of those people. I'm from Kentucky. I need meat.

ARCHER enters the room. He is now dressed in comfortable sweatpants and a T-shirt.

ARCHER

I'm sorry. The pork chops burnt. I think there might be a little left over ham. Check the fridge. You could put it on your salad.

AILEEN

Thank God I brought crackers . . . and, they were an impulse buy.

ARCHER

You really do need to give me my keys back.

AILEEN

Nope.

ARCHER

I'm tired of you just walking in

AILEEN

I didn't just walk in. I knocked. I need a drink.

ARCHER

Refill mine, will you?

AILEEN

Should you be drinkin'?

ARCHER

I took myself off the pills.

AILEEN

Arch . . .

ARCHER

(Cutting her off) You got off early. I thought they were starting that sale.

AILEEN makes them both drinks.

AILEEN

I don't want to talk about it. That job is really. .

ARCHER

(Cutting her off) I thought you didn't want to talk about it.

AILEEN

But, it's bad . . . really bad.

ARCHER

It hasn't even been a month.

AILEEN

My supervisor called me into his office again. Some lady told customer service that I refused to help her.

ARCHER

And?

AILEEN

Well, I was going on my break. It's not funny. Mr. Thistle can be pretty intimidating, especially for an 80 year old. I guess I'm just not a people person.

ARCHER

Maybe you should have thought about that before taking that job.

AILEEN

I'm going to let you in on a little secret. The customer is never right. *(Handing him a glass)* Here.

ARCHER

Thanks.

AILEEN

You want some help with that?

ARCHER

I think I can open a bag.

AILEEN

Let me get the plates. What's new with you?

ARCHER

Nothing.

AILEEN

How are things at the mall?

ARCHER

Same as before you quit.

AILEEN

Archer, I didn't quit. And, I've been fired from places a lot nicer than PRETTY AS A PICTURE. But, I do miss singin' over that loud speaker. You think Sims would take me back?

ARCHER

Aileen, you told him to shove a tripod up his ass.

AILEEN

But, do you think he'd take me back?

ARCHER

No. Besides, you've got a job. You'll get used to it. Just give it more time.

AILEEN

How are things going with Dr. Bronstein? I'm sorry. I promised I wouldn't pry.

AILEEN takes a large sip of her drink.

ARCHER

You better pace yourself.

AILEEN

I need to get a good buzz goin' before meetin' Carson.

ARCHER

You guys having another fight?

AILEEN

No, he just hates it when I sit at the bar. He pretends he doesn't see me and won't serve me. He says I embarrass him.

ARCHER

That's because you do.

AILEEN

Everyone thinks he's gay. It annoys me.

ARCHER

Well, it is a gay bar.

AILEEN

I just like to mark my territory. Some of those queens are relentless.

ARCHER

I think you can trust him. *(Handing her a plate)* Here, take this. They both sit down to eat.

AILEEN

Oh, I know Carson is straight. I just get a little insecure. Some of those guys are prettier than me. You need a refill?

ARCHER

I'm good.

AILEEN

I told him I would meet up with him by eight thirty. I hope that's OK.

ARCHER

Aileen, it's fine. I told you that you didn't even need to come over.

AILEEN

I just didn't want you to be alone. I figured that tonight might be a little . . . well, you know.

ARCHER

It's been a year.

AILEEN

One year tonight.

ARCHER

And, I don't feel anything anymore.

AILEEN

Don't say that.

ARCHER

It's true. Aileen, I'm fine. Wanna check?

ARCHER holds out his wrists.

AILEEN

(Angrily) Don't you dare joke about that. I'm serious. It's not funny.

ARCHER

I'm sorry

AILEEN

You have no idea how that fucked me up.

ARCHER

I said I was sorry. *(After a moment)* Are we OK?

AILEEN

Pass me the crackers. Hey, they're pretty good, aren't they? Look, if you put two of 'em together, you can make a little salad sandwich. You sure you won't join us tonight? We're goin' to a big party at McGiffern's.

ARCHER

No thanks.

AILEEN

You never go anywhere anymore. You're like a hermit, always cooped up here.

ARCHER
I go to work.

AILEEN
You know what I mean.

ARCHER
I like to be alone.

AILEEN
It's not healthy. Give me one good reason why you won't come.

ARCHER
Straight bars make me nervous.

AILEEN
Fine. But, if you change your mind . . .

ARCHER
I won't. But, thank Carson again for inviting me.

AILEEN
He invited you?

ARCHER
Yeah. He called me last week. I thought that was nice

AILEEN
He is a doll, isn't he? *(Fighting a yawn)* Sorry. I am so tired. I haven't been sleepin' well. I had that dream again last night, that one I told you about, that audition one.

ARCHER
You didn't tell me about any dream.

AILEEN
I didn't?

ARCHER
No.

AILEEN
(Thinking) Hmmm. I wonder who I told it to, then?

ARCHER
(After a moment) I'm waiting.

AILEEN

Oh, sorry. Well, I keep havin' this dream that I'm up on stage in this big ol' Broadway theatre and they're havin' open auditions for some new musical. Suddenly, this deep voice booms over the intercom and asks me to sing. So, I launch into "I Feel Pretty." You know, I usually kill on that one. Anyway, things go great for the first few bars and I've got 'em right where I want 'em. Then, I feel somethin' kinda strange in my mouth. It turns out that it's a tooth. My tooth has fallen out. Before I can do anything about it, another one falls out, then another.

ARCHER

God.

AILEEN

I know. It's disturbin'. But, the show must go on. So, I keep singin'. By the last note, all of my teeth have fallen out. I look just like my Great Aunt Charla. She didn't have a tooth in her head and she refused to wear dentures. At dinner, she just kinda gumbed everything, like some sort of ancient insect. She always looked like she was tryin' to swallow her cheeks. Anyway, that deep voice comes on again, thanks me for comin' and tells me that they are lookin' for an actress with teeth. Then, the stage manager hands me a chocolate bundt cake and I wake up. What do you think it means?

ARCHER

I don't know.

AILEEN

It has to mean somethin'. I've had it a few times.

ARCHER

Maybe it means you should get dental insurance or that you have a bundt cake in your future.

AILEEN

It's not funny. It's exhausting.

ARCHER

I know. That Zolof I was on was giving me some strange dreams, too.

AILEEN

Sex dreams? 'Cause, I love a good sex dream.

ARCHER

No, but I do keep having this recurring one. It's weird. I'm walking home from the El. It's dark and I'm all alone. Then, I hear someone or something behind me. I don't know what it is. When I turn around, I don't see anything.

(MORE)

ARCHER (*cont'd*)

But, I know something's there. It keeps getting closer and closer so I began to run . . . faster and faster. Then, I turn a corner, dart out into the street and get hit by a CTA bus.

AILEEN

God.

ARCHER

It gets worse. After I'm hit, my body is thrown up into the air and I land face down on the street. I can't move. I know my bones are broken 'cause I can see one punching out thru my skin. But, I remember that I don't feel a thing . . . no pain . . . nothing. The bus doesn't stop or anything. It just keeps going. And, there is nobody around. I'm just lying there in the street. Then, I hear that noise again . . . that noise from whatever is chasing me. As it gets closer, I manage to turn my head. And, just as it's about to touch me, I wake up.

AILEEN

Oh.

ARCHER

And for some reason, I think it was Brian. Why would he be chasing me? What do you think it means?

AILEEN

I have no idea. Do you eat anything weird before you go to bed?

ARCHER

No

AILEEN

Do you watch a scary movie or somethin'?

ARCHER

No, just CNN.

AILEEN

Oh, I love Anderson Cooper. He has the greatest hair, don't you think? Oh, that reminds me, can I ask you a favor? I was wonderin' if you'd help me with my hair. I wanna wear it up and I can never get it to stay the way you can.

ARCHER

Sure.

AILEEN

I brought a change of clothes, too. I'm not takin' any chances. I want to kick off this year right.

ARCHER

Any word on your callback?

AILEEN

Oh, shit. I should be checkin' my phone. It's still on vibrate. (*Getting her cell phone*) They don't like it when we take personal calls on the floor. Can you believe that? It's like they don't even care that we have personal lives. Your reception sucks in here. I only got one bar.

ARCHER

It's better by the balcony.

AILEEN

(*Checking her phone*) Nothin'. This waitin' is drivin' me crazy. They promised they would announce the cast by today.

ARCHER

Aileen, it's New Year's Eve. I don't think anyone is going to call tonight.

AILEEN

Do you think I should call them? I have their number.

ARCHER

No.

AILEEN

This actin' stuff is a lot harder than I thought it would be. Sometimes, I wish I had a real career like you.

ARCHER

Mall photographer is not a career.

AILEEN

At least you get paid to be creative.

ARCHER

There is nothing creative about shooting pictures of babies in silly costumes.

AILEEN

I guess. Hey, I need you to do new head-shots for me. I think mine might be the reason I ain't gettin' cast.

ARCHER

I told you not to wear the boa.

AILEEN

They just don't seem to appreciate me here in Chicago.

ARCHER

At least you got a call back. That says something.

AILEEN

The Berwyn Community Players ain't exactly The Steppenwolf. But, it did go well. When I was singin' the line "Give me my rose and my glove," I looked over at the director and she seemed impressed. So did all the other nuns.

ARCHER

Aileen, if you don't get this part . . .

AILEEN

You don't think I got it, do you?

ARCHER

I don't know. But if you don't, promise me you won't take it personally.

AILEEN

I won't. I never do.

ARCHER

Ha!

AILEEN

What's that supposed to mean?

ARCHER

ANNIE.

AILEEN

Well, that was different. I would've been a great Grace or Lily, but Cecille? Come on. She does nothing.

ARCHER

She picks out all the clothes.

AILEEN

It's not funny. You don't know a thing about show business. There are small parts.

ARCHER

Well, you do need to start somewhere.

AILEEN

Just say it. You think I'm too old to play Laurie.

ARCHER

I didn't say anything.

AILEEN

But, you were thinkin' it. Many of the early Oklahoma settlers were older gals. It's a fact. Google it.

ARCHER
I believe you.

AILEEN
Then, what?

ARCHER
I just don't think I can take another month of your being depressed.

AILEEN
Look who's talkin'. Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. That was a terrible thing to say.

ARCHER
No, it wasn't. It's true. You've got to quit worrying about me.

AILEEN
I can't help it.

ARCHER
I'm not gonna try anything again.

AILEEN
Promise?

ARCHER
I promise.

AILEEN
I really wish you'd come with us. Maybe you could meet a nice guy. I'll bet Dr. Bronstein would approve of that, wouldn't he?

ARCHER
I'm taking the fifth.

AILEEN
But, why? We tell each other everything.

ARCHER
No, we don't.

AILEEN
Well, I tell you everything.

ARCHER
And most of it, I don't want to know.

AILEEN
Because you are a prude.

ARCHER

I am not a prude. I'm not.

AILEEN

Then, tell me somethin' personal about yourself. And by personal, I mean sexual.

ARCHER

Why does personal have to mean sexual?

AILEEN

Because sexual is always more interestin'. Come on. It's nothin' to be embarrassed about. Sex is natural. Why if Carson and I don't do it at least two times a week, I can't focus.

ARCHER

Too much information.

AILEEN

I'm serious. I can't concentrate on a thing. My mind starts driftin' and my vision gets blurry. Remember when I wrecked the Citation? That was durrin' the two weeks Carson went to visit his folks in Alabama. I was sittin' behind the wheel and started thinkin' about him. Suddenly, everything went cloudy. I didn't even see the red light. And, remember how I kept lockin' myself out of my apartment? God, those were two of the longest weeks of my life. I don't mind tellin' you, I killed a lot of kittens.

ARCHER

What?

AILEEN

You know.

ARCHER

I don't know.

AILEEN

Yes, you do.

ARCHER

I have no idea what you are talking about.

AILEEN

Killing kittens. I told you that story.

ARCHER

No. You didn't. I think I would remember.

AILEEN

(Thinking) Hmm. I wonder who I told it too, then.

ARCHER

I'm waiting.

AILEEN

Oh, yeah. Well, when my little brother was about fifteen my Mom walked in on him when he was havin' his . . . his . . . his private time.

ARCHER

His what?

AILEEN

His private time.

ARCHER

You lost me.

AILEEN

Are you backwards or what? He was playin' with himself . . . wackin' off.

ARCHER

Oh.

AILEEN

And, mom went crazy. She screamed so loud our neighbor Ol' Miss Lottie took shelter in her storm cellar. She thought it was the tornado siren. Anyway, after she composed herself and talked to Pastor Martin on the phone, she sat us both down and told us that our bodies were temples and it was a sin to touch ourselves.

ARCHER

Of course she did. We got that in school.

AILEEN

Then, she said that every time someone abuses their body, God sends an angel down to kill a kitten.

ARCHER

What? That's horrible.

AILEEN

She's always been dramatic. I think that's where I get it.

ARCHER

What a terrible thing to tell a kid.

AILEEN

Lucky for me I've always hated cats.

ARCHER

No wonder kids get fucked up.

AILEEN

It really did a number on my brother, too. I think that's why he still volunteers at the pet shelter. And, you don't want to know what she told us would happen if we smoked cigarettes.

ARCHER

You're right. I don't. Pass me the wine.

AILEEN

Come on. You don't even have to give me details. Just tell me somethin' simple . . . like the type of guy you're lookin' for.

ARCHER

Aileen, I'm not comfortable talking about this at dinner.

AILEEN

Why not?

ARCHER

I'm just not. Let's talk about something else.

AILEEN

(After an awkward silence) Last week, I decided to try a generic brand of tampons . . .

ARCHER

Aileen!

AILEEN

Well, I'm comfortable talkin' about everything. You're the prude.

ARCHER

I'm not a prude.

AILEEN

Prude.

ARCHER

Fine. When I was younger, I was attracted to tall, dark haired men who were thin and in their twenties.

AILEEN

Yeah, Yeah. Go on.

ARCHER

And, now that I'm getting older, I find that I'm still attracted to tall, dark haired men who are thin and in their twenties.

AILEEN

Hey, we both like the same kind of men.

ARCHER

No, we don't. Carson is short, has red hair and is pushing forty.

AILEEN

But, he's thin and he's a man. Two out of four ain't bad. Pass me that bottle. Now that I know what to look for, I'll try to hook you up. What are the odds that there will be some young, thin guys at the bar tonight?

ARCHER

At a gay bar? I'd say about 95%.

AILEEN

OK. I'll keep my eyes peeled. And, I think I still have a few photos of you in my phone.

ARCHER

Aileen, please don't start showing my picture to strangers again.

AILEEN

I won't.

ARCHER

And don't text, e-mail, Link In, Facebook, Twitter, My Space, Instagram, Snapchat or Tick-Tok them.

AILEEN

(Laughing) My Space?

ARCHER

I'm serious.

AILEEN

Well, if you don't make an effort, how do you expect to get . . . How long has it been since you've had a good . . .

ARCHER

(Cutting her off) You know I haven't dated anyone since Brian.

AILEEN

You've gone a year without sex? That's a lotta dead kittens. You know what you need?

ARCHER

I'm sure you're going to tell me.

AILEEN

You need to get on Grindr or Scruff or Daddyhunt.

ARCHER

How do you even know about those?

AILEEN

I get bored sometimes. I like to set up fake profiles. It only took me seventeen minutes to get banned from Christian Mingle.

A LOUD BANGING NOISE and TWO MUFFLED VOICES are heard coming from the upstairs apartment.

ARCHER

Oh, they're at it again.

AILEEN

Who?

ARCHER

The upstairs neighbors.

AILEEN

What are they doing?

ARCHER

I don't know, but it happens a lot.

AILEEN

That's either a really bad fight or really good sex. I can't tell which. Can you hear what they are saying?

ARCHER

No. But, sometimes I can make out bits and pieces.

AILEEN

It sounds like two guys.

ARCHER

It is. I think one of them is named Tim or Jim.

AILEEN

Are they a couple?

ARCHER

I don't know.

AILEEN

Oh, that sounded like something broke.

ARCHER

It usually lasts only a few minutes.

AILEEN

That didn't sound good. Should we call the police?

ARCHER

No, it will stop in a minute.

AILEEN

We should go up there.

ARCHER

No, we are not getting involved. It could be dangerous.

AILEEN

I'm not afraid. I have Daddy's gun in my purse. How long's this been goin' on?

ARCHER

Since they moved in. I see one of them in the hall sometimes. I think it's the Tim or Jim one. He's probably in his early sixties. Silver Hair. A little pudgy.

AILEEN

It sounds like it's over. *(There is ANOTHER LOUD CRASH.)* I guess not. *(Yelling)* Hey you up there, we're trying to eat salad down here!

ARCHER

Shh.

AILEEN

Honestly, sometimes you can be such a wuss.

ARCHER

I think they've stopped.

AILEEN

I don't know how you can put up with that.

ARCHER

It's not that bad.

AILEEN

Aren't you at least a little bit curious?

ARCHER

No. You know what they say about curiosity. Besides, every building has a noisy tenant.

AILEEN

Not mine.

ARCHER

Maybe that's because you are the noisy tenant.

AILEEN

I've had one complaint. It was when I was practicing *Les Miserables*. And, that turned out to be Nathan. He came down and we did duets. You really should go out with him. He likes you. He told me.

ARCHER

Are you about finished with that?

AILEEN

Yeah. Here, let me help. (*They start to clear the table.*) You didn't eat much.

ARCHER

I'm not hungry.

AILEEN

You've gotta take better care of yourself. You've lost a lot of weight.

ARCHER

I'm fine. Nathan did call me. I meant to tell you. He's looking for some head-shots. Maybe he can come over and I can do yours at the same time.

AILEEN

You just don't want to be alone with him.

ARCHER

He's so tiny.

AILEEN

He gets cast a lot. You know how many times he's been in OLIVER? (*Crossing to the stereo*) How about a little music?

ARCHER

But, not the radio. I'm so sick of Christmas music. If I have to hear Patsy and Elmo one more time, that radio is going to end up at the bottom of the lake, along with Brenda Lee. She's rocked around that tree way too many times this year.

AILEEN

Hey, why do you have two IPOD's? I don't even have one.

ARCHER

That one is . . . was . . . Brian's.

AILEEN

(Reading) Barbra, Bernadette, Bette, Celine, Cher, Britney, Christina. God, he was such a queen.

ARCHER

That he was.

AILEEN

This is possibly the world's gayest IPOD. Listen to this play list. Ethel, Judy, Linda, Liza, Patti . . . This is the Richard Simmons of IPOD's.

ARCHER

Then, don't play it.

AILEEN

Oh, I like this one. It was one of our workout songs, when we used to go to the gym!

ARCHER

Aileen, we went four times . . . four times in one year. What a waste of money. Brian was the gym bunny.

AILEEN selects the song and it begins to play.

AILEEN

But, remember the routine he tried to teach us? Let me see if I can still do it. Check this out.

AILEEN tries to execute the routine, but fails miserably.

ARCHER

That's not it.

AILEEN

I think it is.

ARCHER

It's not. And, what's with the jazz hands?

AILEEN

Then, show me. Come on.

ARCHER

OK. Start it again. One, two and three. *(ARCHER launches into the routine and delivers a flawless performance of an almost "Broadway" type production number.)* And, then you repeat it. No, you've got to kind of hold your butt while you bend.

AILEEN

Oh, yeah. I forgot. Brian was so hot when he did that. How's this?

ARCHER

You look ridiculous.

AILEEN

But, how does my ass look? I can feel the muscles tightening, so it must be working.

ARCHER

Stop it. You're going to hurt yourself.

AILEEN

No pain, no gain. Feel this.

ARCHER

No thanks.

AILEEN

Feel it. (*AILEEN puts ARCHER'S hand on her buttocks.*) Anything?

ARCHER

Nothing. Still gay.

AILEEN

(*Laughing*) Damn.

ARCHER

Turn that down.

AILEEN

You afraid we're gonna disturb them?

ARCHER

I just don't want to make trouble. (*Turning the music down*) What are you wearing tonight? Over the head or button?

AILEEN

Over the head.

ARCHER

Then, you go put on your top while I finish cleaning up. I don't trust you with the dishes. You never pre-rinse.

AILEEN

I don't see the point in havin' a dishwasher if you're gonna wash the dishes first.

ARCHER

Just put on your top.

AILEEN opens her bag and takes out a shiny blouse.

AILEEN

Check this out. Doesn't this scream New Years?

ARCHER

It screams something.

AILEEN

Well, I like it. I got it at Forever 21.

ARCHER

Forever 21? What were you doing . . .

AILEEN

(Cutting him off) Shut up. It was on clearance. Guess how much.

ARCHER

I don't know.

AILEEN

Come on, guess.

ARCHER

Ten dollars?

AILEEN

It was fifty, originally two hundred. I bought it with part of the money Carson gave me for Christmas.

ARCHER

He gave you cash? That's not very romantic.

AILEEN

He wanted to buy me clothes, but I talked him out of it. Straight men have no taste. And, he always seems to pick those weird colors.

ARCHER

He couldn't have done much worse than that.

AILEEN

Just wait. It looks better on.

ARCHER

It has to.

AILEEN

Hey, do you remember that sweater set Carson bought me for my birthday? What did you call that color?

ARCHER

Raspurpleen. (*AILEEN starts to remove her top.*) Don't do that here? Go into the bathroom.

AILEEN

I'm wearin' a bra. Besides, you're not interested in these.

ARCHER

Stop it. You know, the curtain's open. People can see you.

AILEEN

What people? We're up twenty six floors. The only people who could see in here would be people with telescopes.

ARCHER

Or window washers.

AILEEN

(*Going to the French doors*) If there's a window washer out there tonight, he deserves a free show. (*AILEEN flashes out the balcony.*) Happy New Year.

ARCHER

Put those away. Go change.

There is a knock at the door.

AILEEN

You expectin' someone?

ARCHER

(*Crossing to the door*) No. And, I didn't hear anyone buzz.

AILEEN turns off the music, as ARCHER looks through the peephole.

AILEEN

Who is it?

ARCHER

I don't know. It's a guy. A cute guy. He must have the wrong apartment.

ARCHER starts to open the door.

AILEEN

A guy? Wait! I'm not dressed.

ARCHER

I thought you weren't shy.

AILEEN grabs her top and runs into the bedroom. ARCHER opens the door.

JOSHUA

Hi. Sorry to bother you. I'm your neighbor from upstairs.

ARCHER

Oh . . . Uh . . . Hi.

JOSHUA

I'm J.R. I just wanted to apologize about the noise earlier.

ARCHER

Oh, that's OK. I hadn't noticed. I'm Archer.

JOSHUA

Nice to meet you.

AILEEN comes back into the room, wearing her work blouse.

AILEEN

Are you gonna invite him in, or what?

ARCHER

Oh . . . Gosh . . . I'm so sorry. Come in.

AILEEN

(To Archer) Did you just say "Gosh"?

ARCHER

Shut up.

JOSHUA enters.

JOSHUA

Thanks. I can only stay a minute. I'm on my way out.

ARCHER

J.R. this is Aileen. Aileen this is J.R. He lives upstairs.

JOSHUA

Hi. My name is Joshua Robinson, but everyone calls me J.R. We moved in a few weeks ago.

AILEEN

Hi J.R. Grab a seat.

JOSHUA

I really can't. I just wanted to apologize about the noise we were making up there. We were havin' a bit of a disagreement and it got a little out of hand.

AILEEN

Who won?

ARCHER

That's none of our business.

JOSHUA

I guess it was a draw.

ARCHER

We really didn't hear much. These ceilings are pretty thick.

JOSHUA

No, they're not. How was the salad?

ARCHER

That was Aileen.

AILEEN and JOSHUA share a laugh.

AILEEN

It was oddly un-filling. OK, I'm just gonna say it. You are one good lookin' guy.

ARCHER

Aileen . . .

AILEEN

Well, he is.

JOSHUA

Thanks.

AILEEN

You said he was "cute." *(To JOSHUA)* I'll bet you're a model.

JOSHUA

I've done a little.

AILEEN

I knew it. Are you gay or straight?

ARCHER

Aileen!

AILEEN

Well, life is too short.

JOSHUA

It's OK. I'm gay.

AILEEN

Figures. Single or involved?

JOSHUA

Well . . . I live with a guy. His name is Tim. And, what about you guys, are you guys a couple? Married?

ARCHER & AILEEN

(In unison) No.

AILEEN

We're just friends.

ARCHER

And, I don't know why.

AILEEN

I'm straight and involved, but Archer is gay.

ARCHER

Aileen . . .

AILEEN

And, single. Really gay and really single.

JOSHUA

You do look familiar. I feel like I've seen you before. Have we met?

ARCHER

I don't think so.

JOSHUA

Do you go to Planet Fitness?

ARCHER

No.

JOSHUA

Are you on Grindr?

ARCHER

No!

AILEEN

Is he?

JOSHUA

I don't know.

AILEEN

I am. But, I'm incognito.

JOSHUA

Oh. *(To Archer)* I've probably just seen you around the building before. Well, I was just on my way over to the liquor store across the street. If you guys want anything, I don't mind picking it up. It's probably a zoo over there.

ARCHER

I think I'm all set.

AILEEN

And, I'm headin' out to The Ruby Slipper.

JOSHUA

Oh, I love that place.

AILEEN

My boyfriend is a bartender there.

JOSHUA

The cute blonde?

AILEEN

No, that's Thad. Carson is the red head.

ARCHER

The one with the braces?

AILEEN

He gets them off in six months.

JOSHUA

Well, I'm sure he's very nice, too. You guys will have fun. It gets crazy there, especially the late crowd.

ARCHER

Oh, I'm not going. I'm just going to kick back and watch a movie or something.

JOSHUA

On New Year's Eve? A nice looking guy like you?

ARCHER

I'm just not in the mood.

AILEEN

I told him he needs someone to kiss at midnight.

JOSHUA

And to dance with. That's the most important thing. You're supposed to dance out the old year and dance in the new. Otherwise, it's bad luck.

AILEEN

I've never heard that before.

JOSHUA

At least that's what my grandmother used to say. Although, I think she might have made that up to get my grandfather to dance with her. She always wanted to be a Rockette. Well, I need to run. It was nice meeting you both.

ARCHER

You too.

AILEEN

Bye. And, don't be a stranger.

JOSHUA

We'll try to keep it down up there.

ARCHER

It's OK.

AILEEN

Feel free to drop by anytime.

JOSHUA

Thanks.

AILEEN

I mean it, anytime . . . day or night.

ARCHER

Aileen . . .

JOSHUA

(Laughing) I'll remember that. *(Exiting)* Bye.

ARCHER

Just say it.

AILEEN

Damn that boy is fine. Even in that jacket . . . Did you notice his body?

ARCHER

No.

AILEEN

You didn't notice his ass? *(Archer shakes his head)* Liar.

ARCHER

OK, I noticed.

AILEEN

I'll just bet he has a six pack, too. Just once I want to be with a guy who has a six pack and not one on his back.

ARCHER

He's a lot younger than his partner.

AILEEN

He didn't say he had a partner. He said that he "Lives with a guy." He didn't say they were a couple.

ARCHER

Same thing.

AILEEN

No, it's not. You should ask him out. He said you were "nice lookin."

ARCHER

I could be his dad . . . almost.

AILEEN

You know what they say, "Father knows best."

ARCHER

Go put on your blouse.

AILEEN

I don't know if I could live here knowin' that hot thing's up there . . . right on top of me . . . all night long. Oh, I can't focus. My vision's gettin' blurry.

ARCHER

Go change

AILEEN

OK, but before you go to bed tonight, you better warn your neighbors, lock up the cats.

As AILEEN exits into the bathroom, ARCHER takes a deep breath, as if letting down his guard and relaxing for the first time in a while. He picks up his glass, refills it and takes a large sip.

ARCHER

Did you bring your brush?

AILEEN

(Off Stage) In my purse. Spray and mirror, too.

ARCHER

(Looking in her purse) You really do have a gun. I thought you were kidding.