

THIRD

BY WENDY WASSERSTEIN

CHARACTERS

EMILY (20), a college student home on spring break, smart, confused, and daughter of LAURIE (50s), a well-respected English professor, who is kind, but ambitious, and facing difficult issues: menopause; anger over the war in Iraq; her father, in a home due to Alzheimer's. In this scene, EMILY confronts her mother about her liberal bias, which is more biased, and destructive, than LAURIE would like to admit.

SCENE

LAURIE'S living room

TIME

Late evening

LAURIE is in her home watching Frankie Avalon sing "Venus" on TV. SHE is wearing pajamas. EMILY walks in.

EMILY: Mom. Are you still up?

LAURIE: (*Turns off the TV*) Yes. I'm watching this fabulous reunion on public television of all these pop stars I liked in high school—Bobby Vinton, Frankie Avalon.

EMILY: Who?

LAURIE: Oh come on, Emily. You never heard (*SHE starts to sing*) "Venus, if you will, please send a little girl for me to thrill." It still makes me weep.

EMILY: Did you just say "a little girl for me to thrill?"

LAURIE: It doesn't bear deconstructing.

EMILY: When I think of you and music, it's always Mahler.

LAURIE: Always Mahler could get a little overbearing.

EMILY: Okay, Mahler and Phil Ox. You know, that antiwar folk singer Daddy likes who hung himself.

LAURIE: Ochs, honey, Ochs. God, I'm old. But I must say, it's sort of fascinating culturally. Here are these truly bubble-gum pop stars—I mean people who

were in beach-blanker-bikini movies—and now they have reunions on public television right after Daniel Barenboim and the Chicago Symphony.

EMILY: I guess.

LAURIE: No, seriously, as an evolution it's very interesting. It's like thirty years from now you're seeing Britney Spears on stage at the Metropolitan Opera.

EMILY: She's already been there for the MTV awards.

LAURIE: Sorry. I told you I'm old. Where have you been?

EMILY: Out.

LAURIE: Honey, spring break's only two weeks and you've been out every night. Don't you want to spend some quality time together?

EMILY: Mom, I've tried, but you're always screaming at the television.

LAURIE: I wasn't tonight.

EMILY: It's after midnight. How many times can you listen to the same Headline News every twenty minutes?

LAURIE: They can always slip in a fast one.

EMILY: You can slip in a fast one, too.

LAURIE: What do you mean by that?

EMILY: I met this guy at a bar.

LAURIE: Oh, I'm so glad you're seeing other people than Richard.

EMILY: Mother, I'm still with Richard. That doesn't mean I can't talk to someone else at a bar.

LAURIE: Sorry. Just checking.

EMILY: Anyway, this kid turns out to be a student at this college and when I asked him how he liked it, he tells me about this bitch professor who almost got him thrown out for plagiarism.

LAURIE: You met Woodson Bull?

EMILY: He likes to be called Third.

LAURIE: Oh, Christ, yes, Third. Like our president, Grandpa Bull, Daddy Bull, and Baby Bear Bull.

EMILY: Mother. He has nothing to do with the president. He's a bartender.

LAURIE: Then he must be writing a term paper on what it actually feels like to earn a living. Because he certainly doesn't need to work.

EMILY: His family has no money. His father is a small-claims lawyer in Ohio.

LAURIE: He told you that?

EMILY: Yes. You categorized him and you got him totally wrong.

LAURIE: Emily, please, not tonight. I spent the entire day with Grandpa at the clinic. He asked me twice: "Where do you live?" and "Do you have any children?" Please, just tell me what a wonderful mother I am and how much you love me.

EMILY: Mother, you almost ruined this kid's life.

LAURIE: That's a little hyperbolic, isn't it? In the big picture this kid will be fine.

EMILY: You don't know that.

LAURIE: If Frankie Avalon can land on public television, then Woodson Bull the Third will be fine.

EMILY: God, you are the most arrogant, glib, impossible woman. Daddy's right. For all your endless babbling about open perspectives, you're the most limited person I know.

LAURIE: I don't believe your father said that.

EMILY: How would you know? You never listen to him. You joke about giving him steroids. You are completely unfair to Daddy, you're completely unfair to Richard, and you were *completely* unfair to Woodson Bull.

(LAURIE is silent.)

You decided he plagiarized because you needed that to be true. Just like they decided there were weapons of mass destruction because they needed *that* to be true.

LAURIE: Don't compare me to this administration.

EMILY: Mother, you had an agenda. If he were a gay, Native American playwright, you wouldn't have touched him. Just like you never bother to mention that Rena, my beloved sister's partner, is cheating on Zooney, just because Rena's a published poet.

LAURIE: Your sister's partnership is none of my business.

EMILY: But my partnership with Richard is?

LAURIE: Richard is thirteen years older than you and a bank teller who plays guitar on Saturday nights in a bar in South Philadelphia. He doesn't even want to be a musician. He just wants to chill. Emily, you can do a lot more with your life than spend it with a man whose ambition is just to chill.

EMILY: You mean I could be like you are with Daddy. Just be with a man I silently resent.

LAURIE: I love your father.

EMILY: You resent my father because he's not a star and you can't go to your stupid dinner parties and brag about him. You're not a power couple. You've totally eclipsed him.

LAURIE: Emily, I'm very hot and I'm going to bed.

EMILY: Just so you know, Richard got a job in a bank near his parents in Trenton and I'm moving in with him next month. I'll wait tables until I figure out what I want to do.

LAURIE: What the hell are you talking about? Emily, do you really think life will be more equitable when you're a thirty-year-old waitress at the Rusty Scupper in Trenton?

EMILY: I want out of your world, Mother. I don't want to judge people on their schools, their influence, or the success of their latest essay in *The New York Review of Books*.

LAURIE: This is idiotic.

EMILY: This is my chance not to be you.

(LAURIE'S beeper starts beeping.)

What's that?

LAURIE: I have a beeper now so the police can beep me anytime Grandpa's missing. I have to go. Honey, we'll talk about this in the morning.

EMILY: I don't know if I'll be here in the morning.

LAURIE exits.