MATT, BETTE, MARGARET, JOAN, EMILY, BOO, KARL, SOOT, FATHER DONNALLY

BETTE’s family, the Brennans, in one group.
BOO’s family, the Hudlockes, in another.
MATT apart. MATT speaks to the audience.

MATT: If one looks hard enough, one can usually see the order that lies beneath the surface. Just as dreams must be put in order and perspective in order to understand them, so must the endless details of waking life be ordered and then carefully considered. Once these details have been considered, generalizations about them must be made. These generalizations should be written down legibly, and studied. *The Marriage of Bette and Boo.*

MARGARET: You look lovely, Bette.
EMILY: You do. Lovely.

MARGARET: A lovely bride. Smile for the camera, girls.

(Speaking out to either audience or to unseen photographer)

Bette was always the most beautiful of my children. We used to say that Joanie was the most striking, but Bette was the one who looked beautiful all the time. And about Emily we used to say her health wasn’t good.

EMILY: That’s kind of you to worry, Mom, but I’m feeling much better. My asthma is hardly bothering me at all today.

(Coughs lightly.)

MARGARET: Boo seems a lovely boy. Betsy, dear, why do they call him Boo?
BETTE: It’s a nickname.

MARGARET: Don’t you think Bette looks lovely, Joanie?
JOAN: (without enthusiasm) She does. You look lovely, Bette.

MARGARET: Where is Nikkos, dear?
JOAN: He’s not feeling well. He’s in the bathroom.

EMILY: Do you think we should ask Nikkos to play his saxophone with us, Joan dear?
JOAN: A saxophone would sound ridiculous with your cello, Emily.

EMILY: But Nikkos might feel left out.
JOAN: He’ll probably stay in the bathroom anyway.

BETTE: Nikkos seems crazy.

(Joan glares at her.)
I wish you and Nikkos could’ve had a big wedding, Joanie.
MARGARET: Well, your father didn’t much like Nikkos. It just didn’t seem appropriate.

(Emily coughs softly.)

MARGARET: Are you all right, Emily?

EMILY: It’s nothing, Mom.

JOAN: You’re not going to get sick, are you?

EMILY: No. I’m sure I won’t.

MARGARET: Emily, dear, please put away your cello. It’s too large.

EMILY: I can’t find the case.

Joan uses her nose spray.

BETTE: I can’t wait to have a baby, Joanie.

JOAN: Oh yes?

MARGARET: (out to front again) Betsy was always the mother of the family, we’d say. Played with dolls all day long, they did. Now Joanie hated dolls. If you gave Joanie a doll, she put it in the oven.

JOAN: I don’t remember that, Mom.

BETTE: I love dolls.

EMILY: Best of luck, Bette.

(Kisses her; to Joan:)

Do you think Nikkos will be offended if we don’t ask him to play with us?

JOAN: Emily, don’t go on about it.

EMILY: Nikkos is a wonderful musician.

BETTE: So are you, Emily.

MARGARET: I just hope he’s a good husband. Booey seems very nice, Betsy.

BETTE: I think I’ll have a large family.

KARL: It’s almost time, Bore.

BOO: Almost, Pop.

SOOT: Betsy’s very pretty, Booey. Don’t you think Betsy’s pretty, Karl?

KARL: She’s pretty. You’re mighty old to be getting married, Bore. How old are you?

BOO: Thirty-two, Pop.

SOOT: That’s not old, Karl.

KARL: Nearly over the hill, Bore.

SOOT: Don’t call Booey “Bore” today, Karl. Someone might misunderstand.

KARL: Nobody will misunderstand.
Enter Father Donnally.

FATHER: We are gathered here in the sight of God to join this man and this woman in the sacrament of holy matrimony. Do you, Bette...?

BETTE: I do.

FATHER: And do you, Boo...?

BOO: I do.

FATHER: (sort of to himself) Take this woman to be your lawfully wedded...
   I do, I do.
   (Back to formal sounding.) I pronounce you man and wife.

JOAN: Come on, Emily.

Emily and Joan step forward.

EMILY: And now, in honor of our dear Bette’s wedding, I will play the cello and my father will play the flute, and my wonderful sister Joanie will sing the Schubert Lied Lachen und Weinen, which translates as “Laughing and Crying.”
   (Long pause.)
   I can’t remember it.

JOAN: (very annoyed) It starts on A, Emily.

EMILY: (tries again; stops) I’m sorry. I’m sorry, Bette. I can’t remember it.

END
BETTE

BETTE: Hurry up, Boo. I want to use the shower.

(Speaks to audience, who seem to her a great friend)

First I was a tomboy. I used to climb trees and beat up my brother Tom. Then I used to try to break my sister Joanie’s voice box because she liked to sing. She always scratched me though, so instead I tried to play Emily’s cello. Except I don’t have a lot of musical talent, but I’m very popular. And I know more about the cello than people who don’t know anything. I don’t like the cello, it’s too much work and besides, keeping my legs open that way made me feel funny. I asked Emily if it made her feel funny and she didn’t know what I meant; and then when I told her she cried for two whole hours and then went to confession twice, just in case the priest didn’t understand her the first time. Dopey Emily. She means well.

(Calls offstage)

Booey! I’m pregnant!

(To audience)

Actually I couldn’t be, because I’m a virgin. A married man tried to have an affair with me, but he was married and so it would have been pointless. I didn’t know he was married until two months ago. Then I met Booey, sort of on the rebound. He seems fine, though.

(Calls out)

Booey!

(To audience)

I went to confession about the cello practicing, but I don’t think the priest heard me. He didn’t say anything. He didn’t even give me a penance. I wonder if nobody was in there. But as long as your conscience is all right, then so is your soul.

(Calls, giddy, happy)

Booey, come on!

END
PAUL, MARGARET, BETTE, JOAN, EMILY

(NOTE: Paul is the victim of a stroke. His mind is still functioning well, but his ability to speak is greatly impaired. Paul’s “actual” lines are in brackets following his dialogue. These should be the lines the actor says, albeit completely unintelligibly.)

BETTE: Mom, Boo drinks. And his father insulted me.
MARGARET: Betsy, dear, marriage is no bed of roses.
EMILY: Mom, is the phrase “my own stupidity” hyphenated?
MARGARET: No, Emily. She’s apologizing to Joanie again about forgetting the piece at the wedding. Joanie was very embarrassed.
BETTE: How can I make Boo stop drinking?
MARGARET: I’m sure it’s not a serious problem, Betsy.
BETTE: Poppa, what should I do?
PAUL: W##hh, ah%#% enntgh oo sh#$w auns$$dr ehvg###ing%#%$$ ahm.
[“Well, I think you should consider giving things time.”]
BETTE: What should I do?
PAUL: (frustrated) On####%t ump oo%#% onoosns$$s. Eggh ing ahm#$.
[Don’t jump to conclusions. Give things time.]
MARGARET: Paul, I’ve asked you not to speak. We can’t understand you.
EMILY: Mom, how do you spell “mea culpa”?
MARGARET: Emily, Latin is pretentious in an informal letter. Joanie will think you’re silly.
EMILY: This one is to Father Donnally.
MARGARET: M-E-A C-U-L-P-A.
BETTE: Boo’s father has given him a very bad example.
(enter Joan, carrying a piece of paper.)
Oh, Joan, quick—do you think when I have my baby, it will make Boo stop...
JOAN: Wait a minute. Emily, I got your note. Now listen to me closely.
(With vehemence)
I forgive you, I forgive you, I forgive you.
EMILY: (a bit startled) Oh. Thank you.
JOAN: (to Bette) Now, what did you want?
**BETTE:** Do you think when I have my baby, it will make Boo stop drinking and bring him and me closer together?

**JOAN:** I have no idea.

**BETTE:** Well, but hasn’t your having little Mary Frances made things better between you and Nikkos? He isn’t still disappearing for days, is he?

**JOAN:** Are you trying to make me feel bad about my marriage?

**EMILY:** I’m sorry, Joanie.

**JOAN:** What?

**EMILY:** If I made you feel bad about your marriage.

**JOAN:** Oh, shut up.

**BETTE:** (to Margaret) She’s so nasty. Did you punish her enough when she was little?

**MARGARET:** She’s just tired because little Mary Frances cries all the time. She really is a dreadful child.

**BETTE:** I love babies. Poppa, don’t you think my baby will bring Boo and me closer together?

**PAUL:** Aszszs&* ot uh er#ry owowd#@ eeah oo uh uh ayee, ehtte. [That’s not a very good reason to have a baby, Bette.]

_Bette looks at Paul blankly._

**END**
MATT, BOO

Matt addresses the audience.

MATT: Twenty years later, Boo has dinner with his son.

BOO: Well, how are things up at Dartmouth, Skip? People in the office ask me how my Ivy League son is doing.

MATT: It’s all right.

BOO: Are there any pretty girls up there?

MATT: Uh huh.

BOO: So what are you learning up there?

MATT: Tess of the d’Urbervilles is a masochist.

BOO: What?

MATT: It’s a novel we’re reading.

(Mumbles.)

Tess of the d’Urbervilles.

BOO: (laughs) A man needs a woman, son. I miss your mother. I’d go back with her in a minute if she wanted. She’s not in love with her family anymore, and I think she knows that drinking wasn’t that much of a problem. I think your old man’s going to get teary for a second. I’m just an old softie.

(Boo blinks his eyes, wipes them.)

I miss your mother, Skip. Nobody should be alone. Do you have any problems, son, you want to talk over? Your old man could help you out.

Boo waits for an answer.

END
Matt, Emily

Matt: The novels of Thomas Hardy, set in his home town of Wessex, contrast nature outside of man with the human nature inside of man, coming together inexorably to cause human catastrophe. We can see something like it in A. E. Housman, or in Emily’s life. Bette becomes pregnant for the second time. Boo continues to drink. If psychiatrists had existed in nineteenth century Wessex, Hardy might suggest Bette and Boo seek counseling. Instead he has no advice to give them, and in 1886 he writes The Mayor of Casterbridge. This novel is one of Hardy’s greatest successes, and Skippy studies it in college. When he is little, he studies The Wind in the Willows with Emily. And when he is very little, he studies drawing with Emily.

Emily: Hello, Skippy, dear. I thought we could do some nice arts and crafts today. Do you want to draw a cat or a dog?

Matt: A dog.

Emily: All right, then I’ll do a cat. Here’s the head, and here’s the whiskers. Oh dear, it looks more like a clock. Oh, Skippy, yours is very good. I can tell it’s a dog. Those are the ears, and that’s the tail, right?

Matt: Yes.

Emily: That’s very good. And you draw much better than Mary Frances. I tried to interest her in drawing Babar the elephant the other day, but she doesn’t like arts and crafts, and she scribbled all over the paper, and then she had a crying fit. Oh dear. I shouldn’t say she doesn’t draw well, it sounds like a criticism of Joanie.

Matt: I won’t tell.

Emily: Yes, but it would be on my conscience. I better write Joanie a note apologizing. And really, Mary Frances draws very well, I didn’t mean it when I said she didn’t. She probably had a headache. I think I’ll use this nice pink piece of construction paper to apologize to Joanie, and I’ll apologize about forgetting the piece at your mother’s wedding too. I’ve never been sure Joanie’s forgiven me, even though she says she has. I don’t know what else I can do except apologize. I don’t have any money.

Matt: Your cat looks very good. It doesn’t look like a clock.

Emily: You’re such a comfort, Skippy. I’ll be right back. Why don’t you pretend your dog is real, and you can teach it tricks while I’m gone.

Matt makes “roll over” gesture to drawing, waits for response.

END
BETTE, KARL, SOOT

BETTE: And then Father Donnally said that I should just keep trying and that even if this baby died, there would be at least one more baby that would live, and then I would be a mother as God meant me to be. Do you agree, Soot?

SOOT: I’ve never met this Father Donnally. Karl, Pauline has a retarded daughter, doesn’t she? LaLa is retarded, isn’t she? I mean, she isn’t just slow, is she?

BETTE: I don’t care if the child’s retarded. Then that’s God’s will. I love retarded children. I like children more than I like people. Did you ever see Jackie Cooper as a child? I thought he was much cuter than Shirley Temple, what do you think, Soot?

KARL: Bette, my wife Soot hasn’t said one sensible thing in thirty years of marriage...

SOOT: Oh, Karl...

(Laughs, flattered.)

KARL: But you’ve just said more senseless things in one ten-minute period than Soot here has said in thirty years of bondage.

SOOT: Oh, Karl. I never was one for talking.

BETTE: (to Karl) Look here, you. I’m not afraid of you. I’m not going to let Boo push me to a breakdown the way you’ve pushed Soot. I’m stronger than that.

SOOT: Oh my.

(Laughs.)

Sit down, dear.

KARL: Tell the baby-maker to turn it down.

BETTE: I want a marriage and a family and a home, and I’m going to have them, and if Boo won’t help me, I’ll have them without him.

KARL: Well, I don’t know about you and Bore. Whatever one can say against your mother, and it’s most everything,

(Soot laughs)

at least she didn’t go around dropping dead children at every step of the way like some goddamned giddy farm animal.

SOOT: Karl, you shouldn’t tease everyone so.

KARL: I don’t like the way you’re behaving today, Soot.
SOOT: Bette, dear, let me give you some advice. Karl’s a lovely man most of the time, and I’ve had a very happy life with him, but I hope Boo is a little kinder than he was. Just a little. Anything is an improvement. I wish I had dead children. I wish I had two hundred dead children. I’d stuff them down Karl’s throat.

(Laughs.)

Of course, I’m only kidding.

(Laughs some more.)
BETTE, BOO

BOO: *(reading)* I pledge in front of Father Donnally to give up drinking in order to save my marriage and to make my wife and son happy, and this time I mean it.

BETTE: Read the other part.

BOO: *(reading)* And I promise to tell my father to go to hell.

BETTE: Sign it. Now if you give up drinking for good this time, maybe God will let this next baby live, Boo.

BOO: Uh huh.

BETTE: And I’m going to go to Mass daily. And Emily is praying.

BOO: Uh huh.

BETTE: You’re not very talkative, Boo.

BOO: I don’t have anything to say.

BETTE: Well, you should have something to say. Marriage is a fifty-fifty proposition.

BOO: Where do you pick up these sayings? On the back of matchpacks?

BETTE: Why are you being nasty? Have you had a drink already?

BOO: No, I haven’t had a drink already. I just find it very humiliating to be constantly dragged in front of that priest all the time so he can hear your complaints about me.

BETTE: You have an idiotic sense of pride. Do you think he cares what you do? And if you don’t want people to know you drink, then you shouldn’t drink.

BOO: You are obsessed with drinking. Were you frightened at an early age by a drunk? What is the matter with you?

BETTE: What is the matter with you?

BOO: What is the matter with you?

BETTE: What is the matter with you?

BOO: What is the matter with you?

*This argument strikes them both funny, and they laugh.*

END
FATHER DONNALLY

_Father Donnally’s marriage retreat._

**FATHER:** In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen. Good evening, young marrieds. The theme of marriage in the Catholic Church and in this retreat is centered around the story of Christ and the wedding feast at Cana. Jesus Christ blessed the young wedding couple at Cana, and when they ran out of expensive wine, He performed His first miracle—He took vats of water and He changed the water into wine.

_(Holds up a glass.)_

I have some wine right here.

_(Sips it.)_

Young marrieds have many problems to get used to. For some of them this is the first person of the opposite sex the other has ever known. The husband may not be used to having a woman in his bathroom. Many priests say they wish they had lived in Christ’s time so they could have met Him; that would, of course, have been very nice, but I’m glad I live now and that I have a shower. Now I don’t mean to get off the point. The point is husband and wife, man and woman, Adam and rib. I don’t want to dwell on the inequality of the sexes because these vary from couple to couple—sometimes the man is stupid, sometimes the woman is stupid, sometimes both are stupid. The point is man and wife are joined in holy matrimony to complete each other, to populate the earth and to glorify God. That’s what it’s for. So, for God’s sake, if you’re going to get married, pay attention to what you’re doing, have conversations with the person, figure out if you really want to live with that person for years and years and years, because you can’t change it. I get so sick of these people coming to me after they’re married, and they’ve just gotten to know one another after the ceremony, and they’ve discovered they have nothing in common and they hate one another. And they want me to come up with a solution.

_(Throws up his hands.)_

What can I do? There is no solution to a problem like that. I can’t help them! It puts me in a terrible position. I can’t say get a divorce, that’s against God’s law. I can’t say go get some on the side, that’s against God’s law. I can’t say just pretend you’re happy and maybe after a while you won’t know the difference because, though that’s not against God’s law, not that many people know how to do that, and if I suggested it to people, they’d write to the Bishop complaining about me and then he’d transfer me to some godforsaken place in Latin America without a shower, and all because these people don’t know what they’re doing when they get married.
(Shakes his head.)

So I mumble platitudes to these people who come to me with these insoluble problems, and I think to myself, “Why didn’t they think before they got married?” Why does no one ever think? Why did God make people stupid?”

(Pause.)

Are there any questions?

END
MATT, PAUL

(NOTE: Paul is the victim of a stroke. His mind is still functioning well, but his ability to speak is greatly impaired. Paul’s “actual” lines are in brackets following his dialogue. These should be the lines the actor says, albeit completely unintelligibly.)

MATT: Twenty years later, or perhaps only fifteen, Bette files for a divorce from Boo. My mother’s lawyer reminds me of my grandfather Paul. 

The lawyer is Paul. He still speaks in Paul’s incomprehensible speech, but otherwise is quite lawyerly.

PAUL: Ehl ee att, oo## oou ingorr agh## er uz acgh acgha@ @ lehc?
[Tell me, Matt, do you think your father was an alcoholic?] 

MATT: What?

PAUL: (irritated) Oo## oou ing,orr agh# # er uz acgh acgha @ @ lehc?
[Do you think your father was an alcoholic?] 

MATT: Yes, I do feel he drank a fair amount.

PAUL: Uht us ee acgh acgha @ @ lehc?
[But was he an alcoholic?] 

MATT: I'm really not in the position to say if anyone is actually an alcoholic or not.

PAUL: Ehl ee att, ihd oo## eehh ee or ah # er ah ehaya ohazsn, itt or uher?
[Tell me, Matt, did you ever see your father, on any occasion, hit your mother?] 

MATT: Yes. Hardy wrote Tess of the d’Urbervilles in 1891.

PAUL: (irritated) As ott ut uh ass. [That’s not what I asked.] 

MATT: Oh, I’m sorry. I misheard the question.

PAUL: Ihd ee itt er? [Did he hit her?] 
(Makes hitting motion.)

MATT: Yes, I did see him hit her.

PAUL: Ah!

MATT: Of course, she hit him too. They both hit each other. Especially when they were driving. It was fairly harrowing from the back seat.

PAUL: Ehl ee att, oo oo## ih or ohn lhahf eher agh uh ink?
[Tell me, Matt, do you in your own life ever have a drink?] 

MATT: No, I don’t know any happily married couples. Certainly not relatives.

PAUL: (irritated) As ott ut uh ass. [That’s not what I asked.]
MATT: Oh, I’m sorry. I thought that’s what you asked.

PAUL: Oo oo# ih or ohn lhahf eher agh uh ink?  
[Do you in your own life ever have a drink?]

MATT: No, my paper is on whether Eustacia Vye in The Return of the Native is neurotic or psychotic, and how she compares to Emily. That isn’t what you asked either, is it? I’m sorry. What?

PAUL: Oo oo# ink? [Do you drink?]

MATT: Ink?

PAUL: (gesturing as if drinking) Ink! Ink!

MATT: No, I don’t drink, actually.

PAUL: Eh! ee att, urr oo uhaagee ehn or errens epyrateted?  
[Tell me, Matt, were you unhappy when your parents separated?]

Matt is at a loss. Paul must repeat the word “separated” several times, with hand gestures, before Matt understands.

MATT: No, I was glad when they separated. The arguing got on my nerves a lot. I’d hear it in my ear even when they weren’t talking. When I was a child, anyway.

PAUL: Eh! ee att, oo oo# ink or aher uz uh goooh aher?  
[Tell me, Matt, do you think your father was a good father?]

MATT: Yes, I am against the war in Vietnam. I’m sorry, is that what you asked?

PAUL: Doo oo# ink ee uz a goooh ahzer? [Do you think he was a good father?]

MATT: Oh. Yes. I guess he’s been a good father.

(LOOKS embarrassed.)

PAUL: Buh dyoo oo# ink ee ad ohme or uh inkng bahblim?  
[But do you think he had some sort of drinking problem?]

(Makes drinking gesture.)

MATT: Yes, I guess he probably does have some sort of drinking problem.

(Becoming worked up.)

I mean it became such an issue it seems suspicious to me that he didn’t just stop, he kept saying there was no...

(Pulls back.)

Well, it was odd he didn’t stop. It’s really not my place to be saying this. I would prefer I wasn’t here.

PAUL: Orr ehcoooz, att. [You’re excused, Matt.]

MATT: What?