

THE HOUSEWARMING

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WWE Registration # I291413

SCENE ONE

The gorgeous interior of a renovated Crown Heights row house. Boxes. Furniture in its wrapping. The wood floors gleam in the afternoon sun. This is the beginning of something wonderful. Even the new stainless steel appliances are filled with hope.

ALYSHA and COREY unpack from boxes as they sip from a bottle of Bulleit rye. ALYSHA rubs her hands sensually over the white marble kitchen island.

ALYSHA

Let's have sex right now, on this counter.

COREY

Won't they be here any minute?

ALYSHA

I'm ovulating. Doctor Swan said to do it as much as we can in the next ten hours. We'd have to be fast.

(She starts to unzip his jeans.)

COREY

Fast is my speciality

(He shoves boxes aside, lifting her onto the counter.)

ALYSHA

God, I didn't know I'd be so turned on. You know Carrara marble increases the resale value by 15%.

COREY

So do stainless steel appliances.

ALYSHA

Fuck me against the subzero fridge.

(He carries her to the fridge, slamming her against it.)

ALYSHA

What about the lighting?

COREY

Too bright?

ALYSHA

No, talk to me about the lamps.

COREY

Oh! Uh. They're on dimmers. Italian fixtures.

(ALYSHA moans.)

COREY

They're energy efficient. We have heated Brazilian beechwood floors. We can do it on them too.

(She kisses him.)

ALYSHA

And in our rain shower with the double Thermostatic jets.

COREY

God, you're hot.

(The doorbell rings. They keep going.  
It rings again.)

ALYSHA

Don't stop.

COREY

The cabinets are made from ethically forested cedar.

(kiss)

The fridge has a composting unit.

(kiss)

All this marble, and we're still leaving a minimal carbon footprint.

ALYSHA

Yes!

(An insistent knock on the door.)

COREY

It's Franny and Oscar. We gotta answer.

(They pull away reluctantly. ALYSHA  
smooths her hair.)

COREY

We're gonna make a baby here. I can feel it.

ALYSHA

I think so too.

COREY

Maybe we won't even need the IVF.

ALYSHA

Let's not get into that tonight.

COREY

Okay.

ALYSHA

And don't tell them what we paid for the apartment.

COREY

I wasn't going to.

ALYSHA

Not everyone's comfortable talking about money.

COREY

You mean you.

ALYSHA

(sweetly, pleading)

I just want to have a good time. Okay, boo?

(She kisses him again. COREY takes her hand as they answer with a big smile. FRANNY and OSCAR enter. The ladies hug. COREY daps OSCAR, who registers it with slight surprise.)

FRANNY

Oh my god. Wow. This is so beautiful.

(playfully)

Fuck you.

ALYSHA

Gurl stop.

OSCAR

(warmly)

Dude, you're making the rest of us look bad.

(COREY hangs their coats in the closet. ALYSHA watches as FRANNY is mesmerized by the space.)

FRANNY

AH! I would give an ovary for an open kitchen.

COREY

We're gonna put in a chef's rack to hang our All-Clad pots from the ceiling.

FRANNY

Bish, you hate cooking. I had to teach you how to boil rice.

ALYSHA

I'm learning.

COREY

We got the new David Chang cookbook. We're taking lessons together at the Culinary Institute.

ALYSHA

Last week we went to a Siracha tasting.

(rolls her eyes)

It was actually kinda good.

FRANNY

Oh my god. This stove is gorgeous.

(She throws herself on the stove,  
molesting the electric cooktop.)

COREY

That's a Gaggenau. Daniel Boulud has one in his own kitchen.

OSCAR

You guys even got a dishwasher.

FRANNY

If I didn't love you, I would totally hate you right now.

ALYSHA

Thanks?

(OSCAR studies a large glass jar on the  
windowsill.)

OSCAR

Are you guys growing weed?

COREY

Oh no. Alysha and I took a terrarium-making class for my birthday.

(He points at a miniature figure  
nestled in the greenery.)

COREY

Check it out. That's a tiny Al Gore made of hemp.

FRANNY

(meaningfully)

Look at you, all glowed up. Wasn't that long ago we were  
changing price tags at the bodega and puking up PBR in  
Tompkins Square.

COREY

Now she's puking up Negronis in Brooklyn.

FRANNY

You know I'm so proud of you, right?

ALYSHA

Y'all really didn't have to come over to help us unpack.

FRANNY

We don't mind.

ALYSHA

This is the only weekend Corey and I had free to get the  
house together before the parents come.

FRANNY

Happy to help. We don't get to see each other that often.

ALYSHA

It's crazy how busy we all are. You really don't mind? Nobody  
likes unpacking.

FRANNY

You didn't have any other nights free, though right? It was  
this or another month before we were gonna see each other.  
We'll make it a party. An unpacking party.

COREY

We can order in. There's a Thai place we want to try. Lot's  
of vegetarian options. Did you find us all right?

FRANNY

It was a nice walk from the train.

OSCAR

Man, this neighborhood has changed, though.

ALYSHA

It's up and coming.

FRANNY

Uh uh, it's come. You can tell if a neighborhood's gentrified by its coffee.

OSCAR

Barista lingo's like white people code for "it's safe to come, we've got lattes."

FRANNY

In the Bronx, there's Maxwell House for a dollar. You guys have clover.

ALYSHA

We do? What's that?

OSCAR

Dollar coffee that cost six bucks.

COREY

Coffee sucks when it sits out all day. It's a way of making each cup fresh. Made to order. I really like it.

(beat)

But yeah, it's totally overpriced.

FRANNY

I heard Pharrell lives here now. And the whole cast of Girls.

COREY

The chef for M. Wells just opened a brunch spot on Nostrand Avenue. They do a deep-fried poached egg people kill for. There's a two hour wait on Sundays.

OSCAR

So it's like Park Slope without the strollers.

ALYSHA

(defensive)

No. No. It's way more diverse. A lot of Caribbean families-

COREY

There's a cool Afro-fusion restaurant and a Baptist church we want to check out.

ALYSHA

(pointedly)

And the West Indian Parade.

COREY

(not getting it)

And a Whole Foods is opening around the corner.

FRANNY

New York Mag says Crown Heights is *the* place for interracial couples. Hashtag swirl culture. Here, I saved you the issue.

(FRANNY hands ALYSHA a magazine from her giant purse.)

FRANNY

It's like the riots never happened.

OSCAR

Damn, I was graduating high school then. The city was insane for weeks. It destroyed Dinkins' career.

COREY

Hasn't been a black mayor since.

ALYSHA

The Crown Heights Riots were like BLM before Twitter. Blacks thought the cops were giving Jews special treatment.

FRANNY

Jews thought the blacks were anti-Semitic.

OSCAR

Now folks are just killing each other for poached eggs.

COREY

That's a good thing, isn't it?

FRANNY

Who knew the power of a cute coffee shop?

(A beat. ALYSHA sighs.)

ALYSHA

It hasn't changed that much. You shoulda heard our real estate agent. A social worker? Is that a therapist for black people?

FRANNY

She did not?!

COREY

She absolutely did not. She was very nice.

ALYSHA

She loved you.

(to FRANNY and OSCAR)

When I said I do homeless outreach she jumped back five feet, like I had bedbugs. Then she wanted to know if I could have the guy who sits outside her building "removed."

COREY

She asked if you could get him some help.

ALYSHA

That's one percenter for he's ruining my walk to Barney's.

FRANNY

(kinda joking)

Hey aren't you guys like the one percent now?

ALYSHA

Isn't that Bernie Bro for "you're an asshole?" Those people make millions of dollars a year.

FRANNY

Okay, well you gotta be in like the one percent of thirty-year-olds. Hello, you can AirBnB your coat closet.

(trying to smooth it over)

Whatever, this place is amazing. I keep telling Oscar we should buy in our neighborhood, while the Bronx is still cheap.

OSCAR

You got a hundred grand for a down-payment?

FRANNY

Someday we'll be saying, we should have bought that crack house when we had the chance.

ALYSHA

Did you know Corey's on the Bronx re-zoning board?

(proudly)

He's part of the Mayor's new economic opportunity taskforce.

FRANNY

That sounds fancy.

OSCAR

You should tell the Mayor the Bronx ain't for sale.

(FRANNY hits OSCAR semi-playfully.)

FRANNY

Oscar!

COREY

My team is focusing on safer streets, better schools, more parks and playgrounds. It's all for the residents.

OSCAR

The ones there now, or the ones coming?

FRANNY

Oscar's just pissed cuz his favorite dive bar started serving kombucha. A boutique hotel opened next to the Mott Haven projects. They're calling it the "Piano District" now.

OSCAR

I wanna put up a billboard. "Hipsters stay the fuck out." I tell everyone the South Bronx is still dangerous and boring.

ALYSHA

You guys are hipsters.

OSCAR

My mom's lived in the neighborhood since she moved from Puerto Rico in the sixties. My aunt and uncle are still on the same block.

FRANNY

So if anyone's buying there it should be us, babe.

OSCAR

We can't get a mortgage when we're forty grand deep in student loans.

FRANNY

They did. If we don't own, we could get priced out. Where would we go? Hunts Point? Even Brownsville's getting bought up. We can't live on Staten Island, I get sea sick.

COREY

We almost didn't get this place. Even with thirty percent down. People were bidding way over asking.

(ALYSHA shoots him a look. He doesn't notice.)

OSCAR

Why would anyone do that?

COREY

You have to in this market. Especially with all-cash offers.

ALYSHA  
(trying to shift the  
conversation)

White people problems. Which I never thought I'd have. Anyone want a drink?

FRANNY  
Wait. You guys paid all cash?

(COREY's about to answer when ALYSHA cuts him off.)

ALYSHA  
Of course not.

FRANNY  
But you paid over asking?

OSCAR  
Isn't Brooklyn more expensive than Manhattan now?

(ALYSHA scowls at COREY.)

FRANNY  
Come on, this is like one of those apartments you see on TV, and you're like "that freelance writer and her photographer boyfriend could never afford that in real life."

(a beat)

I know I shouldn't ask, but how'd you swing this?

(She waits. COREY looks at ALYSHA unsure of what to say.)

COREY  
We're very fortunate our families could help us out.

FRANNY  
(trying to figure it out)  
With the down payment? And then you guys pay the mortgage?

(COREY glances at ALYSHA.)

COREY  
Pretty much.

FRANNY  
(she turns to OSCAR)  
See babe, it's not impossible. You don't even have to put that much down. For an FHA loan you only need 3 percent.

OSCAR

You know those crashed the market, right?

FRANNY

Don't you want a place no one can kick you out of?

OSCAR

(snaps)

They can still kick you out if you can't pay the mortgage.

FRANNY

Okay, but if we start saving now-

OSCAR

We can buy a studio when we're eighty.

(FRANNY glares at him frustrated.)

FRANNY

Don't be a grump. If they can do it, so can we. We just have to be strategic. There's always Jersey, or I hear Philly is cool.

COREY

You're not considering moving are you?

OSCAR

Absolutely not.

ALYSHA

You can't leave New York. What would I do without you?

(FRANNY slumps on a sofa still wrapped in packing blankets.)

FRANNY

You're the first couple I know to buy a home. Aside from my cousin in Minneapolis. But she had four kids by 28. How productive is that? I have produced nothing. I don't own anything. It makes me want to stick my head in your new oven.

OSCAR

That's not true. There's a cool gallery that went nuts for one of your pieces. They may even do a whole show around it.

ALYSHA

That's exciting. Why didn't you tell me?

FRANNY

I'm only allowing myself a teensy morsel of hope.

COREY

We want to start collecting art. Real, not Urban Outfitters stuff.

(FRANNY perks up. She glances at OSCAR with a sly smile.)

ALYSHA

We did this Brooklyn art walk in Gowanus at the old can factory.

COREY

There's this guy there who's turning portraits of political figures into vampires. Like a National Gallery portrait of Grover Cleveland, but with fangs.

ALYSHA

Really subversive.

OSCAR

Vampires are so out they're in again?

FRANNY

Bloodsucking politicians. Sounds derivative.

ALYSHA

Saying something is derivative is derivative.

FRANNY

What if I made you something?

(FRANNY nods to OSCAR who steps into the vestibule...)

ALYSHA

Really? That would be amazing. But let's see how the place comes to together before we-

(OSCAR returns with an enormous piece of artwork. FRANNY rips off the paper wrapping with glee.)

FRANNY

Surprise! Your housewarming present.

COREY

Whoa.

(Inside a gilded frame, a dozen handwritten cardboard homeless signs are pasted on a canvas surrounded by shards of mirror, ripped magazine ads, and angry strokes of red and brown paint—as if smeared with mud and blood. In the center, a black homeless man begs for change.)

FRANNY

(cheerily)

It's inspired by your social work. I just finished it.

OSCAR

It took her six months.

FRANNY

It illuminates the anguish caused by the failed fantasy of home as a wasteful, consumerist vision of stability.

OSCAR

It would look great over the couch.

(COREY and ALYSHA stare in horror at the painting.)

FRANNY

Don't you like it?

ALYSHA

(stuttering)

Oh my god. It's unbelievable.

(FRANNY hugs her.)

FRANNY

I knew you would get it.

COREY

(recovering, genuinely)

That's so wild. Wow. Thank you.

ALYSHA

Are those actual signs from homeless people?

FRANNY

Yep. I paid ten bucks each for them.

OSCAR

She's been collecting them for awhile.

FRANNY

Let's put it up right now. It can be the first thing you hang in your new home. I brought a hammer.

(FRANNY pulls a hammer out of her purse. She drags the painting.)

OSCAR

Hey babe, be careful. I can do that.

FRANNY

It could be great here. Or what about here?

(ALYSHA and COREY look worried.)

COREY

Let's ask Julia what she thinks before we start putting holes in the wall.

FRANNY

Who's Julia?

ALYSHA

Just a friend of Corey's mom.

COREY

She's a buyer for ABC Home. She's gonna help us decorate.

ALYSHA

(jumping in)

As a favor.

FRANNY

ABC - that's schamncy. You know, I did Becky's studio in Greenpoint in shabby chic, but that's her taste. Not as classy as this, but I could totally help you.

ALYSHA

What about the wasteful vision of consumerist stability?

FRANNY

I like to decorate. We are complex people. Things coexist.

COREY

As long as I can put a big club chair in front of the TV. FIFA!

(He tries to high-five OSCAR who is caught off-guard and misses.)

COREY

You guys have an X-box?

OSCAR

If you like soccer, you should play with my team. We have a pick up game on Sundays.

(FRANNY watches ALYSHA stare at the painting.)

FRANNY

You can just say if you don't like it.

ALYSHA

(choosing words carefully)

Don't be crazy. It's an amazing statement piece. It belongs in a museum.

FRANNY

You said you wanted to collect art. That vampire thing is kitch. I mean, some people would rather have a kitten or a sunset -

OSCAR

What's wrong with a sunset?

FRANNY

We cannot have this argument again.

OSCAR

If something makes you happy, it's just as valid as a Pollock or Rothko. My last Instagram got over 200 likes.

COREY

It was really good. It had the seagull in it, right?

FRANNY

The arts shouldn't depend on the mass validation of your personal experience. You're not supposed to "LIKE" a Robert Motherwell.

OSCAR

When my high school students post photos, they think they're artists. And these kids aren't going to museums. That's not killing art. It's letting poor kids create it.

FRANNY

Instagram is a mall and the currency is "likes." The more likes you get, the more you do the same thing to get more likes. And if you force art into that marketplace, it'll lose and all you'll have left is sunsets and Kardashians.

ALYSHA

I guess Oscar's got a bigger following than you?

FRANNY

I don't make art to satisfy the market. Our culture is obsessed with the trite and commercial.

(OSCAR shrugs it off.)

OSCAR

I like sunsets. Pollock makes me anxious.

FRANNY

Art is supposed to make you feel.

OSCAR

Why can't it make you feel happy?

(FRANNY stares at him frustrated.)

FRANNY

Art should shock you out of complacency. Like Picasso's Guernica. Pretty pictures let us think the world is a safe place, when it's not. If it doesn't make you question yourself or sensitize you to other's suffering, then it's just entertainment.

ALYSHA

Girl, I am neck deep in suffering. I'm allowed to come home and watch some ratchet TV. And by the way, entertainment has made space for black folks in ways fine art never has.

FRANNY

What about Carrie Mae Weems? Kara Walker? A Basquiat just sold for \$110 million, more than any American artist ever. Even Warhol.

ALYSHA

Talk to me when half the faces on a museum wall are people of color.

(COREY snaps his fingers in Occupy-style approval.)

FRANNY

Okay. Fine. Hashtag waking not woke.

ALYSHA

That word is so meaningless now. I was at this cocktail bar, they mixed white wine and Coke and called it woke.

COREY

Hey, speaking of cocktails. How about a drink? I'm really into mixology. I've been doing my own infusions.

(ALYSHA goes to the fridge. FRANNY takes a bottle out of her purse.)

FRANNY

Oh wait! We brought Champagne. Well, a sparkling rosé.

(Just as ALYSHA turns from the fridge with a bottle of Veuve Cliquot.)

ALYSHA

Come through!

FRANNY

It's from the Finger Lakes. It got an award.

ALYSHA

Rosé's my favorite.

FRANNY

Yours is probably better.

ALYSHA

Just give it to me.

(ALYSHA holds the rosé over the sink to open it.)

FRANNY

It's a regular cork. You don't pop it.

(FRANNY pulls a corkscrew from her purse.)

ALYSHA

I don't know how to use this kind.

COREY

I can do it.

ALYSHA

No, let me try.

(She fumbles with the cork. FRANNY takes the bottle.)

FRANNY

I used these when I was waitressing.

(She props it against the counter as she pulls on the cork, talking rapidly as she does.)

FRANNY

I wanted to create something special for you, that you'd always have. So you'd know how important you are to me.

ALYSHA

That's so sweet. It really is spectacular. I think it'd look great in the guest bedroom.

(FRANNY looks up, insulted. The bottle slips out of her hand, crashing against the marble, wine gushing everywhere.)

FRANNY

Oh my god. I'm such an idiot.

OSCAR

Stop. Don't touch the glass.

ALYSHA

Quick, wipe it up before it stains.

(COREY grabs paper towels.)

FRANNY

What do you mean stain? It's hardly got any color.

ALYSHA

Marble is really porous.

FRANNY

Why would you put white porous countertops in the kitchen?

COREY

It's dripping down the side.

(ALYSHA leaps to the other side of the counter to catch the drip, scrubbing as FRANNY and OSCAR stand awkwardly aside.)

ALYSHA

Do you see anything else? Is that pink there?

OSCAR

I didn't know wine bottles could break so easy. I thought you had to smash them against a ship or something.

COREY

It was probably cheap glass. Not that your wine was cheap.

FRANNY

I'm so sorry. I feel terrible. And if you don't like my painting, you don't have to keep it. I was thinking of you when I made it, but...

ALYSHA

What's that red?

FRANNY

(excited)

Oh, so the drama of the red against the negative space-

ALYSHA

No there. Oh my god. You're bleeding.

(FRANNY examines her hand. There is blood dripping down her arm. ALYSHA grabs a paper towel.)

OSCAR

Oh shit. Are you okay?

FRANNY

The glass. Weird, I didn't even feel it.

ALYSHA

Let's get you to the bathroom.

FRANNY

I'm a little woozy. I hate the sight of...

(FRANNY slides to the floor, planting a bloody handprint on the side of the pristine kitchen island. ALYSHA's eyes bulge. She and OSCAR rush to help FRANNY up.)

COREY

Come on, the bathroom's back here...

(ALYSHA wraps paper towels around FRANNY's hand. COREY shows them to the bathroom as ALYSHA frantically scrubs blood off the island. COREY returns, ripping open boxes.)

COREY

We have a first aid kit somewhere. Is it in the bathroom or kitchen box? Don't worry. She's gonna be okay.

ALYSHA

Who smashes a bottle and bleeds on someone's brand new marble counter? It's totally passive aggressive.

COREY

She didn't cut herself on purpose.

ALYSHA

She might not know she did it, but she did.

COREY

She gave us a piece of art it took her six months to make.

ALYSHA

It's a commentary on us. Can't you see that?

COREY

Homelessness is not about one couple buying a house. You of all people know that.

ALYSHA

So that thing doesn't make you feel like an asshole?

(He props the canvas against the sofa and steps back to take a serious look. He runs his finger gently over the brush strokes.)

COREY

It makes me want to get high and stare at it. I think it's woke.

ALYSHA

I hate when you use that word. It's the opposite of woke. A white girl can't paint a homeless black man without showing the racism that put him there. Where's the white lady walking by and ignoring him?

COREY

I think that's what the mirrors are for. You look at yourself looking at someone most of us don't wanna see.

ALYSHA

Well, I see men like him everyday. One of my clients just OD'd. A thirteen year old was raped at a shelter I spent months trying to get her into. I don't need a sign telling me to care. I'm doing the best I can.

COREY

(calming)

Okay, okay. If the painting really bothers you we can donate it to Housing Works, or the DHS lobby.

ALYSHA

She'd never get over it. She may never get over this house.

COREY

Friends figure out a way to be happy for each other. She'll get there.

(beat)

This is a nice place and people are going to have feelings about it. You gotta deal with that.

ALYSHA

Why doesn't it bother you?

COREY

I'm a liberal, feminist, straight white male in New York, I'm used to feeling like a jerk.

(In the bathroom, FRANNY sits on the toilet looking away from her cut as OSCAR gently washes it.)

OSCAR

Are you okay?

FRANNY

I am totally in shock.

OSCAR

Should we get you to the hospital?

FRANNY

No, at this house!

(looking around)

I can't believe they have a full bathroom down here. Aren't there two more upstairs? I feel light-headed.

(He kneels down in front of her.)

OSCAR

I think you're gonna be fine. Hey look at me.

(She does. He blows gently on her face and the cut.)

OSCAR

Better?

(FRANNY relaxes.)

OSCAR

My mom did that when we were kids. To calm us down when we got shots.

FRANNY

You're gonna be a great dad.

(She touches her stomach.)

OSCAR

So when are you gonna tell them? Over dinner?

FRANNY

We'll see.

Oscar

Wasn't that the whole point of coming over tonight?

FRANNY

How are we gonna raise a child in a 400 square foot studio?

OSCAR

You know that shelf above the stove, I thought we'd put the baby there.

FRANNY

(playful, but still worried)

You're not funny.

OSCAR

My parents had three of us living with my grandma in an apartment not much bigger than ours. We turned out fine.

(OSCAR dampens a paper towel, kneels down in front of her.)

FRANNY

What if we drive each other crazy? What if I have nowhere to paint? What if the baby wants a dog?

OSCAR

Relax mamacita.

(dabbing at her cut)

This is gonna sting a little.

FRANNY

This place is so beautiful it hurts.

OSCAR

There's no character. They completely wiped out what was here before.

FRANNY

It was probably a dump.

OSCAR

That dump was someone's home. But nobody wants to be reminded of that. It's a little rude she asked us to unpack her stuff, isn't it?

FRANNY

She didn't ask. I offered. I wanted to see her before I started showing and this was the only time she had free.

OSCAR

She's that busy?

(FRANNY shrugs, unsure.)

FRANNY

We're never gonna have something like this, are we?

(OSCAR stands abruptly. He places her hand on her bandage.)

OSCAR

You're still bleeding. Hold this on here. I'll be right back.

(He exits. In the kitchen where COREY has unearthed the first aid kit. ALYSHA is staring at the painting. Behind her, COREY snaps a picture of it with his phone.)

ALYSHA

(she sighs heavily)

You know this is a test, right? You can't give someone a gigantic painting you made and expect them to hang it in their new home. We're gonna have to put it up every time she comes over.

(OSCAR enters from the hall, surprising them. We don't know how much he's heard. ALYSHA freezes.)

OSCAR

Do you guys have any more paper towels?

(ALYSHA shoves the roll at OSCAR. COREY gives him the first aid kit.)

COREY

Do you think she needs stitches?

OSCAR

I hope not. She's terrified of needles.

(He exits. ALYSHA peers down the hall waiting until he's gone.)

ALYSHA

Shit. Do you think he heard? I didn't say it's not good. I said it was a test.

COREY

Shhh.

(OSCAR and FRANNY return. FRANNY holds a wad of bloody towels on her hand.)

ALYSHA

Are you okay? You scared us.

FRANNY

I'm fine. Totally fine. It's stopped. I'm so embarrassed.

ALYSHA

We thought we'd have to rush you to the hospital.

FRANNY

I took two aspirin earlier. It makes you bleed easily. I'm fine. Let's celebrate.

COREY

How about that champagne?

ALYSHA

Good thing we have another bottle.

(COREY uncorks the Veuve and pours it into beautiful champagne flutes. FRANNY lifts her bandaged hand for a toast.)

FRANNY

To my old friend, congratulations on your perfect new home. We are so fucking happy for you.

(They clink their glasses, sipping thoughtfully in silence.)