

# Reunion at Mt. Sanguine

Doug Stewart

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# "Reunion at Mt. Sanguine"

A play by Doug Stewart

## Synopsis

"Reunion at Mt. Sanguine" is the simple story of a small Midwestern farm town high school's 50th class reunion, and the classmates who made it memorable. At the reunion we meet class members whose compulsions, addictions, and obsessions have affected their post-high school lives for 50 years, as well as the influence from beyond the grave of one who is no longer with them.

In the course of the evening we get to know, among others: The cyber-stalking computer nerd whose purpose for attending is to avenge a 50 year-old humiliation; the high school football hero whose weakness for alcohol propels him into perpetual reenactments of his moment of glory; the family newscaster whose children / grandchildren are superior to all others; the retired and widowed professor who attempts to rekindle a 10th grade romance; and the fictional family of a childless State Department executive who has no life-style regrets.

Like the Big Band music that defined the era, running through the reunion evening is the story of Alice Wittington, who for nearly 50 years has carried the ghost-like memory of a fiance felled in the Korean War like an emotional shield – and the classmate with the courage to call a ghost a ghost.

The reunion at Mt. Sanguine. All in all, it was quite an evening.

\* \* \*

Featuring:

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Alice • Barbara • Calvin • Edith • Harry • Jack • Julie  
Maggie • Phyllis • Tom



## "Reunion at Mt. Sanguine"

### Notes on the author:

**Douglas Stewart** is an author, playwright, and performer, working primarily in the area of senior theatre. He is also an organizational consultant, specializing in the use of experiential education to improve organizational performance in both the public and private sectors.

Dr. Stewart is author of *The Power of People Skills* and of two books on stress management, *How To Stay Stressed* and *Keeping the Fire Alive* [co-author with J. Dunlap]. His articles on creativity, change, and management skills have appeared in numerous national publications, including Training, Photo Methods, Spirit, Training & Development Journal, and Life magazines.

He was formerly on the board of Milwaukee's Friend's Mime Theatre, where he co-wrote and performed "Dr. Stress & Prof. Burnout," a traveling show. He is also a founding member of the New Mexico Literacy Theatre, a traveling repertory company featuring improvisational programs related to adult literacy. He is currently on the Advisory Council of the Senior Theatre League of America and on the board of the Santa Fe Playhouse community theatre. He is also a member of SRO (Seniors Reaching Out) Players, a senior theatre company in Santa Fe, NM.

Dr. Stewart has written and performed a series of monologues related to senior issues, "Geezer & Charlie," which were featured in an article on one-person shows in Stage Directions magazine. A production of his play "Reunion at Mt. Sanguine" premiered in March, 2002, at Theater Works, in Phoenix, AZ. The play was also the Third Place Winner of the 2002 Oklahoma Community Theatre Association New Play Contest.

A former university professor, Dr. Stewart has taught in art and counseling departments at Ohio University, Northern Illinois University, and the University of New Mexico. He has also been a sports psychologist consultant to the Boston Red Sox and other professional baseball organizations. •••



## Reunion at Mt. Sanguine Class of 1950 • *Go Warriors!*

### CAST NOTES

**Harry Aikens** ..... **Retired Mt. Sanguine Buick-Olds-Cadillac dealer.**

Arguably the best high school quarterback in Mt. Sanguine history, he had one great moment of athletic glory. A very successful local businessman, we discover that he has become somewhat overly fond of alcohol, to the agony of his wife, Edith.

**Edith Aikens** ..... **His wife, a former high school cheerleader.**

She is a long-suffering home-maker, wife, and mother. She has seldom traveled beyond Mt. Sanguine County, except for occasional shopping trips to Chicago and to new car introductions around the country with Harry. She is not above using soap-opera situations to enliven her farm town existence.

**Calvin Atwood** ..... **The class nerd, now very much into computers.**

He is sadly lacking in social and interpersonal skills, being quite shy – except when his obsession takes over. It becomes apparent through his sardonic speech and ultimate behaviors that his sole purpose in attending the reunion is retribution – the settling of an old score with some of his high school classmates. Other than when engaged in that all-consuming mission, he is largely a hair-combing nervous bystander.

**Phyllis Baxter** ..... **Retired Mt. Sanguine County employee.**

Although socially very outgoing, she knows little to talk about beyond her own family, the center of her life and social contacts. Her ego is propped up by the importance – real or imagined – of her family and their accomplishments. Locally she has had few serious bragging competitors – until the reunion.

**Tom Baxter** ..... **Her husband, a retired tax accountant and now a gentleman farmer.** He is socially dominated by Phyllis when they are together, but becomes somewhat more outgoing when they are apart. Even then, however, he contributes little of intellectual substance to a conversation.

**Julie Brand** ..... **Former high school cheerleader and retired executive secretary.** We don't know much about Julie, except that she is still good-looking, thinks she is sexy, and is very focused on attracting the attention of men. She is probably divorced – perhaps more than once – but is now apparently single. Hers is the story untold.

**Maggie Eastman** ..... **Retired local J.C. Penney marketing director.** She still seems young and a little naive; not unexpected, perhaps, given her self-restricted relationship background as it unfolds during the reunion. The caring support of Alice Wittington helps her become more self-confident as the reunion develops, to the point where she can finally share her past and ask searching questions of Alice.

**Jack Larson, PhD**..... **Retired professor of agriculture, Univ. of Illinois.**  
Jack is a well-published and respected academic, now retired as department head from a major Big Ten university. He's also a devoted father – especially following the death of his wife. He is relatively warm and comfortable interpersonally, but given his long academic background, he is also somewhat formal and reserved.

**Barbara Tennet** ..... **Financially comfortable and well-traveled widow.**  
The only woman of color in the Class of 1950, she is straight-forward and socially at ease – and the most outspoken of all members of the group. With a beguiling in-your-face attitude and energy, it is she who would most likely point out to all concerned when an Emperor wears no clothes. She received a sizable inheritance when widowed which she now uses to travel extensively and educate her children. She is a friend and Mt. Sanguine neighbor of Maggie Eastman. In her travels, she and Alice Wittington have gotten together at various locations overseas.

**Alice Wittington** ..... **Class Valedictorian and retired senior State Department embassy administrator.** The play's central character, hers is the story of the transformation of her approach to her future and to the 50-year obsession that determined her past. A Smith College graduate, she is well-educated, worldly, smart, and hip.

At the beginning of the reunion, she is apparently very satisfied and comfortable with her single, independent, and self-determined lifestyle – and plans to stay that way. But as in all of our lives, unexpected things happen....

## STAGING NOTES

1. Blackouts between scenes are as short as possible, with characters moving quickly to new positions. They occur only when there is a shift of location and /or passage of time.
2. People are constantly in slow motion on the set, apparently talking, laughing, drinking, gesturing (limited). Except for occasional muffled laughter, however, only the scripted characters are heard.
3. At appropriate times, many characters go in and out of the ballroom entrance. The intended impression is that there are many more people at the reunion, although we never see them.
4. The evening is warm, so as the evening goes on men loosen or remove their ties and women remove any scarfs, jackets, etc.
5. We often see HARRY AIKENS in the background coming from the ballroom - where the bar is located - with a drink in his hand. At least twice we see his wife EDITH interact with him in a way that indicates her displeasure with his drinking.
6. The refreshment table contains coffee, water, various snacks, napkins, plastic utensils, and one or more bouquets of vased daisies.
7. Timing is crucial to the flow and pacing of the dialogue, as there are many interrupted lines. There is no problem with stepping on the tail of other lines, as in this case it is better to be a little too early than a little too late and leave the line hanging.
8. The play is structured such that it can be presented either as a one-act, with a playing time of approximately 80 minutes, or a two-act, with an Intermission following Scene 9. The one-act structure is preferable.
9. CASTING SUGGESTIONS
  - a. Ideally, BARBARA TENNET is black, the only black woman in the Mt. Sanguine Class of 1950. If a white actress is used, certain script changes can be made appropriately.
  - b. CALVIN ATWOOD is small and balding
11. MUSIC SUGGESTIONS
  - a. Big band music from the 40's is heard periodically from the entrance to the ballroom. Never loud, it is not heard at all during the scenes in the rest rooms.



- b. Big band music is also used for the overture preceding the curtain and while the audience is being seated and exiting. It can also be used as a separation between scenes.
- c. A recorded rendition of the Mt. Sanguine Fight Song can precede the curtain, fading as the lighting comes up. It can also be used during the curtain call, fading with the final lighting.

## 12. COSTUME SUGGESTIONS

- a. HARRY AIKINS is wearing his old high school football letter sweater, looking much the worse for wear, over a shirt and tie.
- b. EDITH AIKINS is wearing a conservative, Midwest, go-to-church outfit. Nice, but not noticeable.
- c. CARVIN ATWOOD appears somewhat disheveled, for although he is wearing expensive clothes and accessories, they don't match.
- d. PHYLLIS BAXTER is dressed colorfully, but out of style...a recent version of what she would've worn to the high school prom.
- e. TOM BAXTER, despite the August heat, is dressed in a conservative 3-piece dark suit, white shirt, and conservative tie. (IBM would be pleased.)
- f. JULIE BRAND's outfit is colorful, flamboyant, and as sexy as possible in a public gathering. Of questionable taste, it is obviously intended primarily to attract male eyes.
- g. MAGGIE EASTMAN is dressed modestly, in contemporary good taste.
- h. JACK LARSON, PhD, is comfortably dressed in appropriate slacks, jacket, shirt, and tie. Friendly earth colors predominate.
- i. BARBARA TENNET is dressed colorfully, but in expensive good taste that exudes style and energy.
- j. ALICE WITTINGTON is dressed smartly, with the expensive under-statement that is worn well by those accustomed to it.
- k. All can be wearing a reunion name tag.



## The Mt. Sanguine High School FIGHT SONG

(To the tune of the Notre Dame Fight Song)

“Fight, fight for Mount Sanguine High!

Lift up her glory into the sky!

Drive, you Warriors, down the field;

We’re going to win – we never yield!

Fight on forever, fight ‘till you bust!

Grind our opponents into the dust!

While our Warrior team is marching

Onward to Vic-tor-eee!!

[spoken] *Fight! Fight! Fight!*

\* \* \*

[Lyrics by Robert Jerkins, with apologies to  
The University of Notre Dame]

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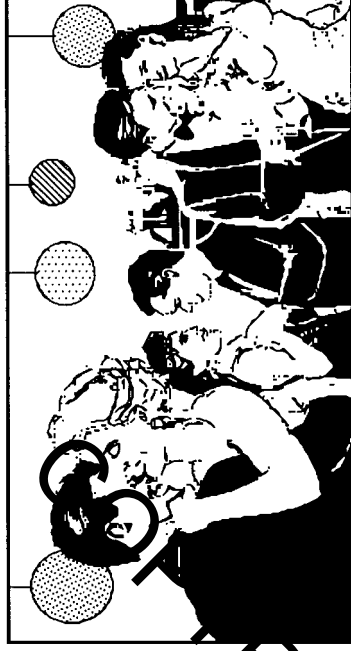
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## Reunion at Mt. Sanguine Class of 1950 • Go Warriors!

The simple story

of a 50th high school class reunion,  
and the classmates who made it memorable

A Play by  
Doug Stewart

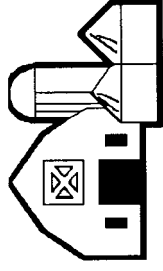
# Reunion at Mt. Sanguine

## Go Warriors!

### CAST

- Harry Aikens** ..... Retired Mt. Sanguine-area Buick-Olds-Cadillac dealer
- Edith Aikens** ..... His wife; home-maker and former high school cheerleader
- Calvin Atwood** ..... The class science nerd, now very much into computers – and other things
- Phyllis Baxter** ..... Retired Mt. Sanguine County employee and family cheerleader
- Tom Baxter** ..... Her husband, a retired tax accountant and now a gentleman farmer
- Julie Brand** ..... Former high school cheerleader and retired executive secretary
- Maggie Eastman** ... Retired local J.C. Penney marketing director
- Jack Larson, PhD** .. Retired professor of agriculture, Univ. of Illinois
- Barbara Tennen** .... Financially comfortable and well-traveled widow
- Alice Wittington** ... Class Valedictorian; retired senior State Department embassy administrator

\* \* \*



### PLACE

Mt. Sanguine is a small farming community somewhere within an easy 3-hour drive of Chicago, Illinois. Surrounded on all sides by fields of corn, the flat horizon is broken only by solitary farm buildings and the ever-present grain elevators. It is a town – and a landscape – which indelibly stamps its personality on its inhabitants.

### SETTING

The dance at the 50th class reunion of Mt. Sanguine High School's class of 1950, the "Warriors." The setting is the large lounge area adjacent to the aging Mt. Sanguine Hotel's ballroom and the adjoining rest rooms.

### TIME

A warm mid-August evening, 2000. With the unusually dry summer weather, cornfields are suffering and the wholesale price of hogs is down. Farmers and townsfolk alike are worried.

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# Reunion at Mt. Sanguine

Doug Stewart

## SETTING:

The large lounge area adjacent to the ballroom in the aging Mt. Sanguine Hotel. It is a warm August evening, the evening of the Class of 1950's big dance, the central feature of their reunion.

A registration table is near the entrance, UPSTAGE RIGHT. On it hangs a banner, "Welcome Mt. Sanguine High School, Class of 1950. Go Warriors!" A "State Champions, 1949" banner hangs on the wall behind the table.

The room is decorated with balloons, colored streamers, "Warrior" pennants, and other gala decorations. An opening STAGE LEFT leads to the ballroom through which Big Band music from the 40's is faintly heard.

Further DOWNSTAGE RIGHT, next to the refreshment table, is an easel upon which rests a posterboard panel, entitled "In Remembrance." It contains the high school yearbook photos of the 17 deceased members of the class of 1950. Beneath each photo is the name and date of death, in small enough type that the audience cannot quite read the names.

DOWNSTAGE LEFT a refreshment table contains coffee, bottled water, various snacks, napkins, plastic utensils, a metal water pitcher, and one or more bouquets of vased daisies.

## AT RISE:

Stage is black. LIGHT COMES UP on the photo panel, holds for a moment, then COMES UP on the entire set.

MAGGIE EASTMAN and BARBARA TENNET are manning the registration table and talking with one another. PHYLLIS and TOM BAXTER are conversing, HARRY and EDITH AIKENS, JACK LARSON and CALVIN ATWOOD are at the refreshment table. CALVIN is attempting to look at his reflection in a metal water pitcher while he is combing his hair.

Scene 1

ALICE, MAGGIE, BARBARA, PHYLLIS, TOM, HARRY, EDITH

*[As LIGHTS COME UP, ALICE enters, looks around the room, sees the registration table, and walks towards it. As she approaches, both MAGGIE and BARBARA turn, see her, and jump up to greet her.]*

MAGGIE: *(gives Alice a long and joyous hug)* Alice! You came! I was so afraid you wouldn't be here. You were so uncertain when I called.

BARBARA: *(also giving ALICE a big hug)* Hi, girlfriend! And welcome home, world traveler!

ALICE: Hey, world traveler yourself! You haven't changed a bit! I was afraid maybe we did you in last Spring in Paris.

BARBARA: Paris? In the Springtime? Not a chance! *(pause)* Maggie told me you had some doubts about coming.

ALICE: Well, I wasn't sure, right up to the time I got on the plane.

BARBARA: There are still some tough memories here, aren't there?

ALICE: *(sobering)* Yes, there are. And now that Mom is gone, too . . . well, there just isn't the same push to come back here. Oregon is too far away.

BARBARA: And . . . ?

ALICE: You know the rest. *(brightens)* But I couldn't resist seeing you and Maggie – besides, who knows who else might show up? *(turns to MAGGIE)* And Maggie! You look terrific! Just like your last batch of pictures! *(Steps back and looks her over carefully)* Except maybe for the hair. It's even shorter. I like it!

MAGGIE: *(obviously pleased)* You do?

ALICE: Oh, yes! You look . . . radiant. If I didn't know better, I'd say you were a teenager in love!

MAGGIE: (*looks a little uncomfortable*) But you came!

ALICE: Yes, and I want . . .

PHYLLIS BAXTER: (*Ignoring MAGGIE and BARBARA, who soon move back to their places at the registration table.*)

Alice! Alice Wittington!

[*ALICE obviously looks at their name tags, reminding herself who they are*]

How good to see you! You remember Tom – classmate, husband and father of *all* my children? Quite a feat these days, isn't it? Not like when we were in school. Then it was one guy, one life . . . for better or for worse.

TOM BAXTER: Hi, Alice. Maggie told Phyllis you might be coming.

On the way over she was telling me of the time you and Billy Stroud, she, and a couple of others went out and . . .

PHYLLIS: Never mind, Tom. That's water long over the dam.

ALICE: (*smiling*) Good to see you again, Tom. And you're re . . .

PHYLLIS: Yes, Tom's retired. Underfoot around the house all the time. But I've found plenty for him to do.

TOM: That's true. I don't even have ti . . .

PHYLLIS: Trouble is, now that he's retired he also thinks he's a gentleman farmer. God only knows why. Comes home smelling like . . . well, you know what.

TOM: But I clean my . . .

PHYLLIS: But, Alice, what about you? Where have you *been* all these years? Did I hear you were way up in the State Department or some other big government position?

ALICE: I don't know how big, but, yes, I was in the State Department. Except for visiting my folks and a few friends, I guess I've been out of the country most of the last 40 years. I just have itchy feet. But I . . .

PHYLLIS: And I'll bet you've had some real adventures! What was your most exciting?

ALICE: (*thinks a moment*) Well, once I was on a hijacked plane from Bombay to . . .

PHYLLIS: Bombay! Our son Frankie was in Bombay a couple of years ago. Sent there by his company to close some complicated business deal. I never did understand the details, except that it was very big. I know he didn't like Bombay much, though – all that poverty and filth, you know. Nothing like his penthouse in Manhattan.

ALICE: (*with a touch of irony*) I'm sure.

PHYLLIS: But where are *your* kids?

ALICE: Actually, I never . . .

PHYLLIS: I know, we never get to see ours much, either. They're always dashing off somewhere important. Thank God for e-mail! Of course our daughter Henrietta is still at home — her dyslexia has never gotten much better. Poor dear – just can't seem to hold a job.

TOM: (*pointedly*) Phyll, that isn't something Alice is interested in. Is it, Alice?

ALICE: Well, I . . .

PHYLLIS: Of course it is, Tom! Every mother wants to know about other people's kids, don't they, Alice?

ALICE: I suppose so, but I don't . . .

PHYLLIS: Oh, there are the Aikins, Tom! Excuse us, Alice, but I need to ask Edith about her oldest grandson. I heard at bridge club that he may have a scholarship to Harvard! Imagine! So good to hear about your travels. See you on the dance floor. Come on, Tom.

*[When they are out of earshot of Alice]*

TOM: Now why did you have to go bringing up Henrietta again? You know I don't like being talked about all over town. (*mimics*) "Oh, they're the couple with the dyslexic daughter. I wonder whose genes caused *that?*" And of course everyone will think they were mine. You'll see to that.

PHYLLIS: Nonsense! Every mother can sympathize with another woman when there's a problem like that. Besides, Alice lives in Oregon.

TOM: Oregon, Smoregon – there's no telling who she'll talk to while she's here.

PHYLLIS: I've heard about enough, Tom. Now let's just try to enjoy the rest of the evening for a change, shall we?

*(Waves to the Aikins across the room)*

Edith! Edith Aikins!

*[PHYLLIS and TOM meet EDITH and HARRY at CENTER STAGE.]*

PHYLLIS: Oh, we had just the most interesting conversation with Alice Wittington! Imagine! Someone from little Mt. Sanguine ending up a Somebody in the State Department! (*With a hint of sarcasm*) Of course, that's what you'd expect from a graduate of ... well ... you know, one of those Eastern schools. And she was such a dear friend of mine in high school, you know. She was telling us all about her exciting adventures in those foreign countries. You know, like Berlin, or Bangkok, or Burma, or ... well, somewhere over there. Wasn't she, Tom?

TOM: Well, we didn't really get ...

PHYLLIS: And my dears, what's all this I hear about your grandson getting a full scholarship to Harvard?



EDITH: Yes, we got the news last Wednesday! We're all so excited! Of course, we just *knew* he'd get it – he was so absolutely brilliant in high school. I guess Stanford and MIT's loss is Harvard's gain.

HARRY: Yep, where our kids are concerned, we always thought the apples never fell far from the tree! Isn't that true in your family, Tom?

TOM: (*caught off guard – he was thinking of something else*) Oh....sure, Harry. Why, our grandson Rick is going to . . .

PHYLLIS: . . . to be an electronic genius, no doubt about it. Of course our daughter Henrietta . . .

TOM: ... is spending some time with us over the summer. It's quite a treat for us, (*firmly*) isn't it, dear? But excuse us, we want to catch Calvin Atwood before . . . .

PHYLLIS: . . . before all the single women flock after him. Until he sold whatever that marvelous electronic thing is he invented and retired to that gorgeous estate in Florida, he was our personal computer guru, you know. Everyone says he's a real genius. And now he's *rich*!

[*TOM and PHYLLIS move off to find CALVIN. As soon as they are out of earshot, EDITH speaks to HARRY*]

EDITH: "Henrietta." Isn't that their dyslexic daughter, Harry? I wonder whose genes caused that?

End of Scene

Scene 2

ALICE, JACK LARSON

*[JACK is standing, looking around the room, when ALICE comes up behind him and taps him on the shoulder]*

ALICE: Hello, Jack. (JACK turns to see who has tapped him)

JACK: Alice! Maggie told me you were here. How good to see you!

You look wonderful!

*(He gives her an Old Friends Hug)*

You won't believe this, but I was just looking around the room to find you.

ALICE: And instead I found you. *(both smile)* *(She exaggerates looking him up and down)* You look pretty good yourself – for a Professor Emeritus. Not too stuffy!

JACK: *(obviously pleased)* Well, thank you. But how did you know? I thought you were still barging around the world somewhere.

ALICE: *(a little flirtatiously)* Oh, we State Department folks have our ways. *(pause)* But how are you? And the kids, Rachel and Don? Four grandchildren, I understand.

JACK: I give up – how do you know all this? A CIA wiretap in my living room?

ALICE: *(smiles)* No, no – that takes an act of Congress, Professor. Much simpler – Mom and your mother were old bridge playing buddies, remember? While Mom was alive, I could keep tabs on you. But now that she's gone . . . well, I'm afraid I've lost track. *(pause, as ALICE looks around the room)* Where's Ellen?

JACK: *(suddenly sober)* Ellen was killed, a little over two years ago.

ALICE: *(also suddenly sober)* Oh, Jack, I'm so sorry! What happened?

JACK: She was at a church music conference in Chicago. A guy in a big SUV, cell phone stuck in his ear, ran a red light and hit her broadside. Her little Honda didn't stand a chance. She died on the scene. Over 40 years of a beautiful relationship, gone in an instant. *(Pauses to collect himself)* I never had a chance to say goodbye.

ALICE: *(puts hand on his arm)* Oh, Jack.

JACK: *(going on)* The rich sonofabitch hired a big Chicago lawyer and got off with a fine and a few months in the county jail. So much for justice.

ALICE: How did the kids take it?

JACK: You know, Alice, it changed our lives. I've always considered us a close family, but somehow El's death brought us even closer. We've really learned what it means to "celebrate each new day and *(pauses again to control emotions)* . . . to love those around you."

ALICE: *(reflectively)* I . . . I know exactly what you mean, Jack.

JACK: *(brightens)* But what about you? After we had that silly little 10th grade quarrel, I always thought you'd go on to marry Billy Stroud. But then I heard . . . in Korea, wasn't it?

ALICE: Yes, Korea. He was killed by a sniper's bullet, three days after the Chinese entered the war. They couldn't save him, not in the cold, and the rain, and the mud. They were in full retreat. His commanding officer called me after the war. Told me how brave Billy was and that they had done everything they could to save him. But they couldn't...they just couldn't. He's buried in that little military cemetery, you know, out west of town. *(turns away, trying to control herself)* I'm sorry, Jack. I really can't talk about Billy. *(turns back to JACK)* I know, you'd think that after all these years... It's just that...well, it's a very personal thing. I hope you understand.

JACK: I do understand, Alice. I'm sorry if I seemed too inquisitive.

ALICE: No, it's all right. People ask.

JACK: It's just that I'm. . . I'm very glad to see you again. Yes, after all these years . . . very glad.

ALICE: And I you, Jack.

JACK: And if I may run the risk of asking one more question, are you... well. . . you know . . . . ?

ALICE: *(smiling)* Yes, I'm single . . . and retired. And you?

JACK: Almost the same – widowed . . . and retired.

ALICE: Funny how cycles repeat themselves, isn't it? All these years, and here we are – 10th grade all over again.

JACK: But at least now we can legally drink. May I get you one? I understand it's a State Department custom for visiting retirees.

ALICE: I see you get your own CIA reports. Yes, that would be lovely. But not just yet – I'll let the first one settle a bit.

*(bright smile)* But I'll join you for a water-on-the-rocks.

*[They move off towards the ballroom]*

[BLACKOUT]

End of Scene