

DINNER WITH FRIENDS by Donald Margulies

Cut from Scene 2: Karen and Gabe's garden patio. Present day. Spring. Karen and Beth are sitting at the table having lunch after many months of not seeing or hearing from one another.)

KAREN. How long has this been going on?

BETH. A few months.

KAREN. Uh huh.

BETH. We're having such a good time.

KAREN. A few *months*.

BETH. (Continuous.) He's teaching me how to rollerblade!

KAREN. Oh, God.

BETH. I'm getting pretty good at it, too. We play hooky some afternoons and he takes me out to, *you know*, along the canal?

KAREN. Do You wear knee-pads and a helmet and everything?

BETH. Yes.

KAREN. 'Cause you could really hurt yourself on those things.

BETH. It's fun! You should try it. We'll give you and Gabe a lesson.

KAREN. Yea, I can just see Gabe...

BETH. He's so full of life: David; he's so open and optimistic. He's a playmate, *that's* what he is, a wonderful playmate.

KAREN. Boy, that was fast.

BETH. What?

KAREN. Tom is barely out the door...

BETH. Oh, Karen...

KAREN. You didn't want to be alone for a while? You haven't been alone in a dozen years.

BETH. I've always been alone, don't you see? I spent my *marriage* alone.

KAREN. But to get *involved* with someone, right away?

BETH. (Over "...right away?") I'm in love with him.

KAREN. (A beat.) How could you be in love with him?

BETH. I am.

KAREN. (Continuous.) You've only just started seeing him.

BETH. I knew him years ago, I said.

KAREN. Through Tom.

BETH. Right. We went out socially a few times, the two couples.

KAREN. But that's different.

BETH. I mean, it's not like he's a stranger. The preliminaries were out of the way. There's a history there. There was already a kind of shorthand.

KAREN. I can understand its being exciting, I can understand that. But love?

BETH. Why is that so hard to believe? I fell in love with Tom that first weekend at the Vineyard.

KAREN. Okay, and look where *that* got you. Sorry. (A beat.) I just think you have to be careful.

BETH. Karen...

KAREN. (Continuous.) You're very vulnerable right now.

BETH. Oh, please...

KAREN. I don't want you to get hurt.

BETH. I'm gonna marry him. (A tense pause.) David is not Tom. He's not. They're very different men. There's no hidden agenda with him. What you see is what you get. You know? He talks to me; he tells me what he's thinking. He lets me in. (A beat.) So much of my marriage to Tom was this dark little tango, this adagio dance. I don't want that anymore. I want another shot at it. With David. And David wants me.

KAREN. (Nods, then:) I wish you well.

BETH. Thanks. (Pause.) He's great with the kids. You should see him with them. They're crazy about him. Particularly Sammy. He's all over him. Things were so gloomy, after Tom left, you have no idea.

KAREN. I know.

BETH. I never thought my kids would laugh again, I mean it, it was that grim.

KAREN. I'm sure.

BETH. I know what I'm doing, Karen. This is the man I was meant to be with. I really believe that. I had to survive Tom so I could end up with David. It was my fate.

KAREN. That may be, but still, I wish you'd give it more time.

BETH. And let this moment pass? No way. I don't want to let this moment---look, why do I even bother?

KAREN. What?

BETH. You think I'm crazy.

KAREN. I never said that...

BETH. (*Continuous.*) This is my opportunity for a real marriage, a real partnership. But you don't want me to have that do you.

KAREN. (*Over "...do you."*) What an outrageous thing to say. Of course I do!

BETH. (*Over "...of course I do!"*) I'm finally feeling whole, finally feeling like I'm on the right track, for the first time in my life, and what do you do? You undermine me!

KAREN. I am not undermining you, I'm only thinking of what's best for you.

BETH. Oh, I see.

KAREN. Try being alone for a while. That's what I would do...

BETH. (*Over "that's what I would do..."*) What's so great about being alone? Huh? What's so great about it?

KAREN. (*Continuous.*) I would *indulge* myself; get to know myself better...

BETH. That's easy for you to say; You have Gabe, you have this life...

KAREN. Beth...

BETH. You know what I think? I think you *love it* when I'm a mess.

KAREN. What?!

BETH. You do. You love it when I'm all-over-the-place, flailing about. I finally find someone who's like a like an *anchor* and you don't want to hear about it!

KAREN. That is not true.

BETH. As long as I'm artsy and incompetent, everything is fine. The minute I show any signs of being on an equal footing with you, forget it; you can't deal with it, you have to knock me over!

KAREN. How can you say that?

BETH. Come on, you need me to be a mess; you're *invested* in it. Every Karen needs a Beth.

KAREN. That really isn't fair.

BETH. We all play the parts we're handed. I was The Mess. The ditz, The comic Relief. You got to be Miss Perfect: everything just right. Just the right wine, just the right spice, just the right husband. How was I supposed to compete with that?

KAREN. Nobody was asking you to compete with anything.

BETH. You're right, there was no contest; I couldn't possibly reciprocate...the hostess gifts you would give me! I could never tell if you were being remedial or just plain hostile.

KAREN. I had no idea you felt this way...

BETH. We can't all be like you, Karen. God knows I've tried. No matter how much *I* stir, my soup still sticks to the pot. (Pause. *In a conciliatory gesture, beth takes Karen's hand.*)

KAREN. We loved nothing more than having you in our home and cooking you meals.

BETH. We loved it too.

KAREN. You're my family.

BETH. I know.

KAREN. I spent my first twenty years doing whatever the hell I could do to get *away* from my family and my second twenty years doing everything I could to cobble together a family of my own. I thought if I could *choose* my family this time, if I could make my *friends* my family...

BETH. Congratulations. The family you've chosen is just as fucked up and fallible as the one you were born into. (*They resume eating in silence.*) How are the boys? (*Karen, distracted, nods.*) And you and Gabe?

KAREN. We're good. We're fine. (*Beth nods. Silence.*)