

PRODUCTION SCRIPT

god's own cartoon
anvil
(*res ipsa est sua
ultio*)

by Michael S. Crawford

"Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow"

T.S. Eliot

"I gave you everything you ever wanted
It wasn't what you wanted"

U2

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PRODUCTION SCRIPT

God's Own Cartoon Anvil premiered on April 25, 2003,
at Stages Theater in Houston Texas, produced by the
Edward Albee New Playwrights Workshop at the
University of Houston, with the following original
cast:

MAN: HEATH HARPER

WOMAN: GREY SUMMERS

OTHER WOMAN: LIZ SMITH

OTHER MAN: KELLY HARKINS

SIGNIFICANT OTHER: CAROL WORSNOP

BAR FRIEND: MICHAEL MARLOWE

STRANGER: DAVID ELLO

LAWYER: TAAVI MARK

JUDGE: JOANNE DAVIS-JONES

*As directed by Jeffrey Whitted, with Megan Perry serving
as Stage Manager.*

The Players:

Man, 30
 Woman, 27
 Other Woman, 28
 Other Man, 26
 Significant Other, 55
 Bar Friend, 40
 Stranger, 35
 Lawyer, 50
 Judge, 50
 Assorted Extras, 20-30

"Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,
 And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind,
 Nor hath love's mind of any judgment taste;
 Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste.
 And therefore is love said to be a child,
 Because in choice he is so oft beguiled..."

Shakespeare
A Midsummer Night's Dream

PROLOGUE

LIGHTS: INDICATIVE THAT THIS IS A DREAM. SANDBOX SET.

Wordless dream. MAN, WOMAN, OTHER MAN and OTHER WOMAN are dressed as five-year-olds might be. Toys, a playground sandbox scene. *Romeo and Juliet*, by Dire Straits, plays.

MAN plays alone, with a shovel and pail. He scoops sand with pail and builds a pile. WOMAN enters, looks him over, then walks toward him. She takes the shovel from beside him, and takes a few steps as though she were going to run. He looks at her quizzically, then continues to play with the pail. She is surprised and disappointed, but intrigued by his lack of attention. She puts the shovel where it was, and sits beside him, smiling. He looks at her briefly again, with a noncommittal smile, and continues to play. She tries to take the pail, which he has set down in favor of the shovel, but he prevents it without looking at her. She gets up, pauses for a moment, then leaps atop the pile, pushing it over, and sits back down beside him with a sweet smile on her face. As he rebuilds the pile, she succeeds in taking the shovel. He appears frustrated, but she appeases him with a sweet smile, and begins putting sand in the pail to help him build. She puts two or three handfuls of sand in the pail, and dumps it on his head. She laughs; he looks at her for a moment, then laughs, and throws a handful of sand at her. She squeals and throws with both hands. They slapfight,

laughing, rolling around, until they end up grabbing each others' hands. Simultaneously, they lean forward and exchange the fastest imaginable kiss. Both seem shocked and embarrassed but they smile, then hold hands while they continue to play, until the pile is fairly high.

OTHER MAN and OTHER WOMAN ENTER UPSTAGE LEFT pulling a red wagon, OTHER MAN trailing behind, and sit opposite side. WOMAN notices them as they walk over; after looking back and forth between MAN and the others, she gets up and offers them the pail; MAN continues to build, not paying attention. WOMAN continues to watch what they do, and starts to help them build another pile. OTHER MAN and OTHER WOMAN whisper among themselves; MAN does not notice and continues his work. WOMAN leans over and takes part in the whispering. WOMAN and OTHER WOMAN stand and walk away three or four steps, holding hands. MAN notices them leave, and stands and looks at WOMAN. WOMAN shows an impish smile, and shrugs her shoulders, while OTHER MAN works his way behind man. MAN holds out his hand to WOMAN, then points to pile. She moves slowly toward him while OTHER MAN gets on all fours behind him. WOMAN pushes MAN down; he lands on his pile. WOMAN then skips away with OTHER WOMAN offstage, with OTHER MAN running after them, but never managing to catch up. MAN stays prone for a moment, but gets up and goes back to his building.

DARKNESS

STRIKE SANDBOX. BUILD DEPLETED DEN SET.

ACT I, SCENE 1

LIGHTS INITIALLY SHOW ENTIRE STAGE, DIMLY, TO LEND FEELING OF ISOLATION. DEPLETED DEN SET (SOFA ONLY).

MAN and WOMAN lie together on sofa (dressed as adults), WOMAN resting on his chest, asleep. MAN seems to awaken, then carefully rises, not disturbing her. He picks up a worn notebook and pencil from off the floor, then sits on arm of sofa above her and prepares to address the audience (softly at first, louder as he later moves away from the sofa). His demeanor is one of a man at the end of his rope — for whom something must change dramatically for the better by the end of this night. He is, just as he says, not well.

MAN seems about to speak, but a jester's hat is tossed from offstage, landing a little in front of MAN. He regards it with a dead smile, then picks it up, holding it in one hand, until it seems to give him an idea.

MAN opens the notebook and half-reads, half recites, scribbling the occasional addition.

MAN

(eyeing hat)

That I'm the fool, this I acknowledge now,

So early in the night to press the point.

But like a lobster in a pot, the heat,

It rose so slow — a kindness fate bestowed.

I missed the signs; I let my guard go down.

The fight, unthinkable — not meant for me

Or mine. A storybook tale told by two...

Acknowledges WOMAN. Slight mock French accent where appropriate.

One we both hoped to hear. But endings fail

The plot for some; the denouement undone.

MAN begins to walk back and forth.

The page prefers those lines that speak of peace,

Of joy... a trust transcendent, infinite.

These stories we all know and tell again

Exist in static worlds. No change, no growth,

A happy ever after set in stone...

Where off the page, revisions do occur.

LIGHTS dim on sofa, MAN walks to front center stage

Ideals, illusions homemade...faith misplaced.

What tales we tell...beatific, eloquent...

Not meant for here. The page, it selfishly

Denies to us what's best — what's left to touch

Are glimpses, shadows, mist. Just leftovers.

Temptations not to be believed, not made
For those who live where people change and grow,
Becoming who they are too late, post date...
When promises are made that can't be kept.

Pause

A better writer might conceive a way,
Infuse some moral within these lines; put forth
A reason. But, at times, a lack says more.
*MAN looks at jester's hat for a moment, then tosses it back
offstage.*

No kings will die tonight, no princes fall.

No glory in this humble tragedy,
Where something's lost that never could be saved...

For I am not well. Something has to change.
As in this dearth of sleep, these dreams have come.
What should have passed, remains: it shouts at night,
Intrudes in day...I've not an hour without.

MAN turns and walks back beside the sofa.

How many things that shape a life occur
But only in a mind...the world, unchanged.
Worse things have been, I know. But none for me.

DARKNESS

BUILD BEDROOM SET.

ACT I SCENE 2

"It was an acceptable level of ecstasy
As far as anybody could see."

Lyle Lovett

LIGHTS RISE FULL AND SUDDENLY. Party scene. DOWNSTAGE RIGHT/DSC. MAN is on one side of room with a group of offstage male friends; WOMAN likewise opposite side, with offstage female friends. WOMAN dominates the room, even while not heard. Throughout, until noted in the final scenes, when WOMAN speaks to anyone other than MAN there is an emotive quality to her speech and motions, as though she is performing. MAN is happy. WOMAN seems so.

MAN

I can't explain it; it's just what happened. We met, something meshed, and here we are. It's like sailing, being moved by the wind, and not even having to steer. I'm not saying it makes sense...

MAN's friends react with "Are you out of your damn mind?"

WOMAN

I just knew. I spent a day with him, and I knew he was going to be the man I married. We just clicked. I called my grandmother and told her...that's how she met my grandfather, too. She said magic must run in the family.

Her friends react with "Oh, how romantic" and the like, and glance over at MAN.

MAN

(somewhat uncomfortably
noticing glances)

There's something in her that I've never seen before...it's like we've already known each other for years; we can just assume things about each other, and they all seem to turn out true.

His friends react with, "How'd you get three year's whipped in two weeks?" MAN smiles and shrugs.

MAN CONT'D

I know. It doesn't make any sense at all. But maybe good things come easier, who knows?

WOMAN

I trust him. All the crap I've been through over the last few years, and I meet somebody I can *feel* will never hurt me, and that will take care of me. How could I let a chance like that slip away? I'd never see it again...least not before I turned forty or so, and it's too late to do anything.

MAN

She's been through more in the last year than most people see in their entire lives, and that's assuming they survive. Christ, she's amazing in so many ways, and nature chooses her to try to yank out of the gene pool...

WOMAN

I made a deal with God: I'll get through this, but You owe me big, and soon. I guess He's paying off.

WOMAN leaves her friends, walks over and joins MAN's group, taking him by the hand.

WOMAN CONT'D

Talking about me?

MAN

(smiling)

Like you weren't talking about me? They're looking at me like I pulled you up on my big white horse after slaying a dragon.

WOMAN

Maybe you did.

General "good god" reaction from MAN'S friends.

MAN

C'mon, I'll take you away from these cynical bastards.

They move out of earshot of others.

WOMAN

(suddenly subdued)

Let's go home, I'm pretty tired.

MAN swings WOMAN gently around.

MAN

(improvising badly, mock serious, only real smile in entire play)

OK. Let us go, then... There shall we...step the dance of night, and I shall...cleave unto thy womanly...openings — something like that.

WOMAN tries not to laugh, but can't help it.

WOMAN

You are retarded.

MAN

You complain that I don't write you poems anymore — hell, I think that might have been iambic... Let's see, I need a one syllable word for "womanly opening..."

WOMAN

(still laughing)

Just keep your voice down. I know these people.

MAN

Man, I give you spontaneous filthy sonnets, and you act like I'm...

WOMAN

(finishing sentence)

Babbling drunkenly?

MAN

I'm not drunk.

MAN and WOMAN kiss.

MAN's friends apparently watch MAN and WOMAN walk away, and say among themselves, "Who knows, maybe he'll pull it off," and "Yeah, I'll bet they make it — I've never seen him so happy."

WOMAN's friends apparently watch MAN and WOMAN walk away, and say among themselves, "Six months, tops," and "If that long."

WOMAN stops as though saying goodbye. LIGHTS fade as MAN regards her as he addresses audience.

MAN

Magnificent, once...all that I could ask.

This perfect girl lit up the room; she lent

A light wherever she went. She, my wife.

But every night, the moment still would come:

Our door would close. And then...her dues were paid.

The price to be the light exacted...Hard.

DARKNESS

HERE, MAN AND WOMAN CAN PAUSE A FEW MOMENTS, THEN SIMPLY MOVE THROUGH THE DARKNESS TO THE BEDROOM SET DSL.

ACT I SCENE 3

LIGHTS UP, MORE DIMLY THAN BEFORE, NIGHT INTERIOR LIGHTING.
DOWNSTAGE LEFT. BEDROOM, getting ready for bed. Nightstand with phone stage right. WOMAN sits on edge, taking off shoes; MAN plops down behind her, laying against her back. WOMAN speaks, until otherwise noted, very distantly.

MAN
You feeling better?

WOMAN
I guess.

MAN
Did you have a good time?

WOMAN moves to lie parallel to edge of bed; MAN moves to make room. They lie back to back.

WOMAN
Yeah...I just wish...

MAN
...Wish what?

WOMAN
I don't know. It just seems like...

MAN
...Seems like what?

WOMAN
(quietly)
If I say I don't know, it means I don't know.

MAN
Jesus...Well, if something's bugging you, shouldn't you be able to figure out what it is?

WOMAN
Not always. Sometimes things just get under your skin. And it's not like anything bad has ever happened to you, anyway.

MAN
(after a moment)
OK, granted, it's not like getting assaulted in your own hospital bed...but I've still got clothes in the hamper with dirt from burying my Dad. That would qualify as rough in most people's books.

WOMAN
(non-committal)

Yeah.

MAN sits up; WOMAN does not move.

MAN

Yeah? Yeah what? Yeah I might have just the slightest inkling of what you're...I'm here too. I've never wanted to kill somebody before.

WOMAN

Actually, I meant, yeah I was wondering why you weren't doing your laundry.

MAN looks at her for a moment in disbelief, then rolls away from her, off the bed.

MAN

Yeah? Well fuck off.

MAN walks toward offstage.

WOMAN suddenly seems to snap back to life, and sits up in bed.

WOMAN

(earnestly)

Wait, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be hurt your feelings — I'm sorry, please come back...

MAN looks at her for a few seconds, then walks slowly back towards her. She quickly puts her arms around him when he gets close enough.

WOMAN

(tearing up, sincere)

I'm sorry, I don't know why I say things like that...you know I love you, and I know how hard your Dad's passing was on you. You've done really well since he passed. I'm really proud of you.

MAN returns hug, and retakes previous position, with his arm around WOMAN, and her on edge of bed, her head on his shoulder.

MAN

(wry)

I wish you'd just say death. It's not like he believed he was going to pass on to anywhere. Give the man the dignity of his lack of faith.

WOMAN

(sincerely)

All right, I will from now on.

MAN

It's no big deal.

WOMAN

(after a moment)

Do you think your Dad liked me?

MAN

I know he did. Why?

WOMAN

Did he tell you so?

MAN

No, but he would have told me if otherwise, so it's the same thing.

WOMAN

That's good, 'cause I liked him...

They lie back together; MAN immediately sits up.

MAN

Oh wait, let me up. I've got to check the messages to see if the school called. If I win that contest, I've got to get right on it.

WOMAN doesn't move.

WOMAN

You'll win.

MAN dials phone, presses in a four digit code, and presses another button, then listens, expressionless, as WOMAN lights and takes a long drag off a cigarette. MAN then gently replaces the phone, but remains sitting on the opposite edge of the bed, face ashen.

MAN

(after a moment)

I have to go.

WOMAN

(not looking)

Did you win?

She turns and looks at him; suddenly sits up upon seeing his expression.

WOMAN CONT'D

Honey, what is it?

MAN

(after a moment)

My Mom died. That was the doctor who worked on Dad. She had a stroke at home. The guy who cuts the lawn found her.

MAN smashes the phone to the floor, shattering it.

MAN CONT'D

I don't believe this. Grass hasn't even started growing on Dad.

WOMAN

(after a moment)

OK. We're going.

MAN

Really, I looked last week. There's no grass yet.

WOMAN

Things take time to grow, baby. It's already wintertime.

MAN

There were lots of other messages.

WOMAN

I'd better listen to them...They can wait...You stay here; I'm going to get you something to drink.

WOMAN takes a few steps away, then turns back to MAN.

WOMAN cont'd

You're going to be okay. We're going to deal with this, and make it as better as it can be.

WOMAN moves quickly into the darkness STAGE RIGHT, BACK TO WHERE PARTY SCENE TOOK PLACE. LIGHTS FALL ONLY ON MAN, who remains on floor and addresses audience.

MAN

Consumptive days, through retrospect's clear eyes.

For karma, fate, caprices of the gods,

Came down beyond what ever could be earned,

Before we met, before I might have helped.

MAN is quiet for a moment, as he walks to center stage.

No one could rate the turns her plot had called.

LIGHTS SUDDENLY BUT DIMLY DOWNSTAGE RIGHT, as we see WOMAN and ORDERLY. ORDERLY MEETS WOMAN AS SHE MOVES SR, and helps her into a hospital gown, then under the covers in a hospital bed, with an IV, etc.

This brave young girl would fight and win, and then,

This pig would take upon himself to show

MAN continues throughout until the scene concludes, moving slowly SR towards GURNEY, but never entering scene.

An ORDERLY ENTERS STAGE RIGHT, slowly, cautiously. He makes sure they are alone, then adjusts the flow of medication in WOMAN'S IV. He slowly moves to WOMAN, who is semi-conscious, but unable to respond. He lifts the covers, exposing WOMAN, clad only in a hospital gown, and loosens the tie on his pants. He stares at her feet for a few moments, then picks one up, and rubs it gently, tenderly, looking into her eyes. WOMAN stares, confused, and moves her head ever so slightly, but cannot react. He moves one hand up her leg, then does the same with the other, massaging gently, and so raises her gown above her knees. WOMAN whimpers, now assured of his intentions, but remains too drugged to respond. He now grows more forceful, kneading the inside of her thighs, and slowly spreading her legs, finally placing his head completely beneath her gown, hiding his head, as he begins to masturbate.

The baseness of the world she fought so well
 In which to stay. So hard upon: two threats
 To all she was, in every way. Two fronts:
 Her body from within; that pig without.

MAN pauses until ORDERLY begins to masturbate.

And she, that woman there, withstood it all.
 Slow death, and life's worst, beaten in six months.
 Perhaps such feet can't feel the ground beneath...

LIGHTS DOWN ON WOMAN AND ORDERLY.

Fate smiled and winked — she said she found true love.
 She met a boy, who could not help but fall.
The jester's cap is tossed back onstage; MAN picks it up and puts it on.

As storybook as stories come. But blunt
 Reality precludes convictions deep,
 And leaves us wondering why our minds betray.
 Would we could cast our dreams; select the roles,
 Maintain prerogative of who falls where...

Direct our lives, and earn the praise and pans...

Pause

I don't have words, for how she made me feel.

A certain smile and shrug best sums it up...

These lines may scrape the surface, shine some light,

But this endeavor's doomed to fail tonight.

There are no words, no lines, no sets nor scenes,

Which can convey such simple peace of mind...

LIGHTS RISE AGAIN ON WOMAN DSR, SAME LEVEL. *She is disheveled and expressionless in bed, as though in shock. MAN takes off jester's cap and flips it in his hand.*

Consumptive days. When what I knew still was.

LIGHTS FADE TO DARKNESS

STRIKE GURNEY SET.

ACT I, SCENE 4

LIGHTS: DAYTIME INTERIOR. BEDROOM DSL. *MAN sprawls on bed reading from textbook while WOMAN cleans out her dresser. She tosses items to be given away on the bed, covering his lower body. On the nightstand by the bed is a Coca Cola can and an ashtray.*

MAN

Because we already decided on Gage, that's why. It's a helluva good name, and he'll be the only one in his class, if not his school.

WOMAN

12 boys named Brandon, 12 Courtneys in pigtails, and Gage. I hope nobody makes fun of him.

MAN

Can't. They've got nothing to work with — it doesn't rhyme with anything. I think these things through — and besides, it's not like you're pregnant.

WOMAN

We'll both need jobs, so at least one of us should be out of school. And he might be a girl, you know.

MAN

Yeah, you're right. He or she will expect to eat, either way...The Salvation Army calling is an excuse to go shopping for you, isn't it?

WOMAN

Yes. So what? I don't need it anymore; I'd might as well get rid of it.

MAN

I don't care; it just seems like they're phoning more and more often.

WOMAN

Yeah, I guess they are. I gave them some stuff three or four months ago, and at the start of the year...

MAN

So you've worked your way to the top of somebody's list...What do you want to do tonight?

WOMAN

I just want to stay in. I haven't been feeling very well these last few days.

MAN

I can tell. Has it been a month already? Where does the time go.

WOMAN puts down what she's doing.

WOMAN

No, it's not that, although I've got about a week...

WOMAN begins to cry

WOMAN CONT'D

God, I'm sick of feeling like shit all the time. It's been almost two years; my immune system is supposed to be able to take care of me by now, at least better than this.

MAN

Hey, you're doing better, much better. You couldn't go a week without feeling bad when we first met. Now you can go a month or two, sometimes.

WOMAN

(stops crying)

I guess.

WOMAN moves to lie down with him; she puts her head on his chest.

WOMAN

I'm glad I met you. You take good care of me.

MAN

It's easy...You sure you want to stay in? We could just go see a movie, and skip dinner, or I could make something before we go.

WOMAN

Maybe. We'll see how I feel. Could you get me my pills, please?

MAN

Yeah.

MAN opens drawer, removes pill bottle and hands it to WOMAN. WOMAN sits on edge of bed, not facing him, and takes five or six pills. MAN notices diary in drawer and leafs through it for a moment, after glancing over to make sure she's not looking.

MAN

Jesus, what did your Mom ever do to you?

WOMAN, not really paying attention, closes her eyes and lays down.

WOMAN

(sleepily)

What?

MAN

Nothing.

He continues to leaf through four or five pages.

MAN

What's this list of guy's names?

WOMAN

(irritated, but softly)

What?

After a second she sits up suddenly in bed, immediately reacting to the pain this causes her head.

WOMAN

(half guilty, half amused)

Put that down, that's mine.

MAN

Well, what is it? There must be - holy god.

MAN drops book; WOMAN reaches over and grabs it.

WOMAN

(smiling, but uncomfortable)

If you don't want to know things, stay out of my stuff.

MAN

I mean, damn...

WOMAN

Fuck you. Get over it. I didn't know you were alive. I was in college. I was having fun.

MAN

You're in college now.

WOMAN

Not for long. Unlike you...

MAN

(interrupting)

And you had to keep a list? It's one thing to sow wild oats...your face could be on the box.

WOMAN reaches over and tries to smack MAN (hard), but he moves off bed to avoid her, smiling.

WOMAN

You knew what you were doing our first time.

MAN

Largely improvisational. You'd be surprised.

WOMAN

Okay. You've seen my number, what's yours?

MAN

(reaching for book)

Actually, I didn't have time to count yours...

WOMAN throws pillow at him; again reacts to the pain in her head.

MAN CONT'D

Well...let's put it this way. Divide yours by mine, we're still in double digits.

WOMAN

Prude.

MAN

Trollop.

WOMAN

Virgin.

MAN

Slut.

*MAN quickly kisses her on the nose. WOMAN rolls her eyes, reaches over and puts other pillow behind her head, and closes her eyes.
MAN sits on edge of bed beside her.*

MAN CONT'D

You OK?

WOMAN

Yeah, I just want to go to sleep.

MAN

OK. I'll do something about dinner...well, if nothing else, if I ever think you're cheating on me, I can just check the list.

WOMAN

(sleepily)

I would never do that to you.

WOMAN falls asleep.

MAN

(not without irony, after a moment)

I know.

MAN CROSSES TO DSC, speaking as he goes.

MAN CONT'D

Where once was all I ever hoped to have,
Now's void and barren, as though never there.
As time brought loss; and emptiness between.

The jester's hat flies in again; MAN kicks it back, continuing to speak as he moves.

MAN CONT'D

For she grew bitter, cold and sick at heart,
As she could not forgive the fact that I
Was not enough to make her be the one
Her background swore should be her destiny.
And I now tend a healthy hate, that keeps
Me warm at night, and finds me in this place

I've made...Yet I suspect, but one last time.
 Too much has chipped away, and what remains
 Will have to do. Epiphanies have come,
 Undone what faith misplaced allowed. But one
 Remains, unseen. I have to think it out:
 Just one last lie, as yet unrecognized.

DARKNESS

ACT I SCENE 5

LIGHTS IMMEDIATELY TO SAME LEVEL AS BEGINNING OF PREVIOUS SCENE. CENTER STAGE. FULL DEN SET: COFFEE TABLE, LAMP. MAN and WOMAN at home, in DEN. MAN studying, WOMAN lying on sofa, smoking cigarette, watching TV. WOMAN looks away from TV, and glances up to see MAN looking at her.

WOMAN

(uncomfortably, not
 defensively)

What are you staring at?

MAN

You. I can look at you and...sometimes I watch you sleep, and I can see ten different women, all of them beautiful and unique, then they all blend again in your face...That probably doesn't make much sense, but it's true.

MAN, embarrassed, turns back to books. WOMAN appears touched by what he has said, but is silent for a few moments.

WOMAN

So what are we doing?

MAN

Let me finish this and we can do whatever you want. There's supposed to be a new bar downtown that's worth paying to park, or we can rent a movie...whatever.

WOMAN

That's not what I mean.

WOMAN's eyes fill with tears.

MAN

Well Jesus, what did you mean? What's wrong?

MAN moves to her, but somewhat warily.

WOMAN

I mean us. What are we doing? Where are we going to be five years from now?

MAN

Well...I figure we'll both be done with school, both with good jobs, and in a big argument about who's gonna stay home with the kids.

WOMAN

(beatific smile through her tears)

You mean you really...see us getting married and having kids?

MAN

Don't you? That's what we've said all along. We're living together, we're usually happy together...that's just kind of how it works, isn't it?

WOMAN

So what are you saying?

MAN

(smiling)

Is there something you want me to say?

WOMAN

(face falling)

No...never mind. If you don't want to...

MAN

(almost quizzically, after a moment)

But I do want to.

WOMAN

(hopeful again)

You do want to what?

MAN

(after a moment, evenly, matter-of-fact)

I want to marry you. I want us to live together forever, have two or three kids, get old, spend all our money and die simultaneously. It's what we've said all along.

WOMAN

So we're...engaged?

MAN

(after a moment, slowly)

OK. But aren't I supposed to...

WOMAN leaps up, runs to him, throws her hands around his neck, and gives him a passionate kiss.

WOMAN

I have to call my Mom! When do you want to — never mind, I'll figure it out. God, there's so much to do!

WOMAN runs over to phone, excitedly and tearfully calling friends and family.

MAN looks at her quizzically for a moment, and somewhat wistfully. MAN makes his way to DOWNSTAGE CENTER, as WOMAN continues dialing and speaking on the phone, calling six separate people in a minute's time.

MAN

This wasn't what I had in mind, you know.

I would have knelt and popped the box, all that...

So little went the way I would have liked.

But she was happy. Joyful...Satisfied.

Pause. MAN turns to face WOMAN, narrating.

The phone in hand, she spread the word around.

A mechanism is in place for girls,

A system readied years before the day

The plan achieves its practice — people know

Their roles already. Bridesmaids did not need

Be asked: formality required requests;

The question an excuse to cry and hug...

And celebrate fruition of a goal.

Pause

LIGHTS DIM NEARLY TO DARKNESS ON WOMAN.

This soulsick, lovely, anger-driven girl...

The plans were made for long before we met.

Her Princess Day: the hours would fulfill.

A gentle sun, a moonlit dance or two...

Idyllic. Perfect. Pure as rain...Unreal.

She only wanted what she thought she should.

TOTAL DARKNESS AS MAN CONCLUDES. PARTIALLY STRIKE BEDROOM; CREATE HOTEL BEDROOM SET IN PLACE DSL. SET DANCING PLATFORM AND CHAIR FOR MAN'S COAT/SCARF & WOMAN'S DRESS ATOP; SET HOSPITAL.

ACT II SCENE 1

LIGHTS UP. INDOOR LEVEL. HOTEL BEDROOM: DSL WHERE BEDROOM WAS PREVIOUSLY. WOMAN sits putting on makeup before wedding rehearsal and dinner.

MAN, slightly flustered, enters with a few legal-size documents in his hand, initially shielding his face behind them. Seeing MAN, her friends leave the room, after nodding hellos. WOMAN speaks to his reflection until otherwise noted.

MAN

I'm still allowed to see you at this point, aren't I?

WOMAN

Right up to the night before, I think. At least we get to sit together at the rehearsal dinner. We couldn't risk being unchaste, after all.

MAN does not respond.

WOMAN CONT'D

I said "unchaste;" aren't you going to make some...what's going on?

MAN is quiet for a moment.

MAN

Nothing's wrong. In fact...we're rich now. A bit more than I expected, it turns out. My folks didn't make a single unnecessary purchase for fifty years. . .That adds up, apparently.

WOMAN

You've done really well since your Mom died. I'm really proud of you.

MAN

I told you, I want you to say "passed."

WOMAN speaks earnestly until she sees MAN grinning sadly at her.

WOMAN

No you didn't, you said...asshole.

MAN smiles and puts his hands on her shoulders, leaning on her slightly.

MAN

And you're proud of what? It's not like I had any choice in the matter. The circle of life marches on and passes by with death and taxes, sunrise, sunset...I guess by "doing well" you meant not doing things like that...

WOMAN looks at his reflection with a sad smile.

MAN CONT'D

OK. This sucks. But hell, I was lucky — I liked both my parents. A lot of people can't say that...God, fifty years...You live, eventually you die. How can you complain if you were happy with one person for that long?

WOMAN

That's true...So.

She turns to face him.

WOMAN CONT'D

How much more than what you were expecting is...in there?

MAN

Just over eight hundred dollars.

WOMAN

(evenly, unaffected)

Are you kidding or not? Either way...

MAN moves over to her, looks to last page of document, and puts his finger on a number.

MAN

It'll have to do.

WOMAN's face becomes the physical representation of a battle between overwhelming joy and a sense of decorum. MAN watches this take place for a few moments, bemused, then speaks.

MAN

It's all right, you can smile.

WOMAN

(in an exhaled whoosh of air)

Thank you, honey...I mean, you know I loved your Mom, but...

MAN

...this'll make it a few million times easier?

WOMAN

(seriously)

No. I just...I mean, I knew you were...but...

MAN

I know what you mean. I feel the same way. Finish whatever it is you're doing there, and I'll see you at the mission — although I don't see what's so tough about what we're rehearsing.

WOMAN

OK. I love you.

MAN

I love you too.

Big kiss.

DARKNESS

As LIGHTS RISE SLOWLY DSC AND FADE ON HOTEL SET, we see a wedding reception scene DSC, MAN helps WOMAN put on her dress, escorts her to the platform, then puts on his coat and scarf as he speaks. He stands above her, and moves slowly past her DOWNSTAGE, regarding her wistfully as he speaks.

MAN

The wedding was ridiculous in its
Perfection. Everything that might go wrong
Went well. A flawless day in every sense.
A tiny Spanish mission, 65
Degrees, blue skies...a storybook event
That stole from off a page, or painting's frame.

The first of all the songs was ours: I hear
It in a dream from time to time. And then...

The jester's cap flies in from offstage; MAN, irritated, kicks it into audience. He watches WOMAN as he speaks.

I watched her dance. I stood, and watched, her dance.
She moved, she laughed... held court in heaven's clouds.

A player acting out the part of her
Own life. This night the stage; a hand-picked class
Her audience...The set list asked one prop.
MAN turns and watches her dance for a moment or two.

LIGHTS DIM TO DARKNESS

STRIKE PLATFORM.

SET PRESENTS.

ACT II SCENE 2

LIGHTS RISE: INDOOR NIGHT LEVEL. HOTEL SET, DSL. The room is full of gifts, some opened, some untouched. WOMAN back at vanity, removing makeup as MAN enters. MAN behaves as though he has just gotten married. WOMAN speaks distantly until otherwise noted.

MAN

Hi.

WOMAN

(softly, distantly)

Hey.

MAN sits on edge of bed, undoing his tie and cuff links.

MAN

Well? Was it all you hoped it would be? Or is that even possible?

WOMAN

It was...nice. Yeah, it was wonderful, just like I always imagined.

WOMAN sits on edge of bed, fiddling with dress, several feet away from MAN, seeming pensive. Not unfriendly, just strangely removed.

MAN

God, your folks didn't have to pay for this, we could have just stayed with them...

Pause, no response

MAN CONT'D

Well, we've still got the honeymoon to look forward to...right?

MAN moves beside WOMAN.

MAN CONT'D

Are you OK? You seem kind of...deflated.

WOMAN

I'm fine...Would it be all right if we didn't go on the honeymoon, and just stayed here in town two more weeks?

MAN

(after looking at her for a moment)

Are you serious?

WOMAN

Well, I never get to see my friends or my family, so I just thought...no, you're right, I'm being stupid, we can go. That's not fair to you.

WOMAN sighs.

MAN

I didn't say you're being stupid. You've looked forward to this since you were little, planned it out with your friends and all that. It's only human to be a little let down.

WOMAN

So we can stay?

MAN

(surprised, but hides it)

Can we sleep on it? You'll probably feel completely different in the morning...God knows.

WOMAN

(small voice)

I'm sorry.

MAN

I don't want you to be sorry, I want you to want...never mind. Let's just get to bed. We have to be up early to say goodbye to everybody.

She stands and removes her dress, revealing frilly undergarment.

WOMAN

Is it all right if we don't do anything tonight? I'm really tired.

MAN

(sincerely)

It's OK. I'm pretty beat myself.

WOMAN

(eyes filling with tears)

Are you sure? We can if you want.

MAN

I said it's OK...Come here.

LIGHTS DIM

Both move into bed as MAN addresses audience from the bed.

The wedding day, she wanted. Not the night,
And not the years that stretched before her eyes,
Where what should be was not, and could not be.

When pieces take their proper place between,
Love is but a decision, not blind chance;
A choice like any other. Circumstance
Precludes, though, dreams for years held long and close...

MAN eases WOMAN down.

The realization of that fact: her plot,
Henceforth. What I denied, grows clear to her.

MAN stands.

Believe this if you can: I was her friend.
The kids in us, they found a place to play,
With favorite shirts we always wore, and toys
To break and years to waste. I made her laugh.
And both believed, whole soul, that was enough.
As there are things a child can't understand,
Without becoming whom they must become...

(MORE)

MAN (cont'd)

There is no magic in this world. There's much
That seems as such, that masquerades in masks
Removed, when circumstance unseen intrudes. . .
She only wanted what she thought she should.

DARKNESS

RESET BEDROOM SET DSL.

ACT II SCENE 3

LIGHTS UP; FLUORESCENT HOSPITAL FEEL. HOSPITAL SET, DSR. WOMAN lies in bed, awake, cranky. MAN enters, with stack of magazines.

MAN

They only had a couple left of the ones you wanted. I did the best I could.

WOMAN takes the stack of magazines, looks at the titles, then tosses them down by her feet.

WOMAN

Best hospital in town and they can't keep fucking magazines in stock. Did you talk to my family?

MAN

Yeah, they'll be here as soon as they can. It was kind of short notice, this time.

WOMAN

(irritably)

I'll try to be more convenient next time.

MAN

Least this didn't happen in the islands...and we had a good time, didn't we?

WOMAN picks up magazine.

MAN CONT'D

Hell honey, maybe there won't be a next time. You're running out of organs.

WOMAN

(sullen)

Great.

MAN

I'm half serious. Something can't go wrong if it isn't there...you've had just about everything cut out that might cut out on you.

WOMAN

You know, that's really not funny.

WOMAN throws magazine down by her feet.

MAN

I'm not trying to be funny; I'm serious. You're reaching the point where you're going to have to be healthy by default.

MAN moves closer to her.

MAN CONT'D

Is there anything you want?

WOMAN

(with feeling)

To go home. And not have to come back here ever again.

MAN

I know what you mean.

WOMAN

(Growing emotional, eyes tearing, but keeping voice down. Quickly.)

No, you don't. There's no way that you could. You haven't spent months of your life in these fucking places, getting stabbed by every second person that walks in the door, to the point all your veins have collapsed, and they have to spend twenty minutes just setting up the IV. You're not the one practically immune to painkillers. Sometimes I wonder if it's...

MAN

(after a moment)

No, I don't know, but I have to watch it happen to you, and there's nothing I can do about it. I'd switch places with you if I could. Doesn't that... register with you somehow?

WOMAN

(stoically)

Yes...but not right now...You can go home. I just want to try to sleep.

MAN

I'm staying.

WOMAN

I don't want you to stay.

MAN

(moving to sit down)

We've already established that your life sucks; one more thing isn't going to make any difference.

WOMAN looks at him with something approaching disdain, and turns away from him. MAN takes a magazine, and sits in a chair.

LIGHTS FADE TO DARKNESS

STRIKE HOSPITAL SET PERMANENTLY.

ACT II SCENE 4

"The coolest thing I ever saw,
You were sittin' there smoking my cigarettes
You were naked on the bare stone floor..."

Lloyd Cole

LIGHTS: DAYTIME INTERIOR LEVEL. FULL DEN SET, CENTER STAGE. WATCHING TV. MAN does not look at WOMAN until "Honestly, it really. . ."

WOMAN

(not rudely)

Can we watch something else? You've seen this ten times.

MAN

As vampire movies go, this one's damn good. Besides, things are just about to get juicy...You feeling OK?

WOMAN

Yeah, not bad at all...Maybe you were right, and everything that could go wrong has gone wrong...

She watches movie for a few moments.

WOMAN CONT'D

Are you sure you don't have a thing for George Clooney?

MAN

Pretty sure...let me double check...yeah, no getting around it, he's a man.

WOMAN

And you couldn't ever imagine yourself with a guy.

MAN

(after a moment)

Is this where you ask me if somebody put a gun to my head and made me choose a man to bump, who I'd pick?

WOMAN

(smiling, sitting up and
toward him, interested)

OK. Who?

MAN

(smiling, not looking at
her)

I don't know you that well.

WOMAN moves closer to MAN.

WOMAN

(seductively)

C'mon. I want to know.

MAN

I'm sure you do, and I'd never hear the end of it...Honestly, it really wouldn't matter...Relatively hairless would be nice.

WOMAN

That's something. A feminine man.

MAN

The idea just doesn't appeal to me. I've known since I was 12 that I like girls. One I'd known all my life walked by in a bikini, and it was like a switch turned on...A woman's body, you...you look like home to me. A guy just looks like where I am.

WOMAN

So you've never seen an attractive man.

MAN

I can recognize a good-looking man. I can also spot a cute little kid...

MAN leans toward her with a playful smile.

MAN CONT'D

So what about you? If you had to pick a woman...

WOMAN

(immediately interrupting,
looking at screen)

Her.

MAN

Her who? Selma something?

WOMAN

Salma Hayek. I would have sex with Salma Hayek.

MAN

(after a moment)

Well, at least our tastes are the same.

They look at the screen for a moment.

MAN CONT'D

How about now?

WOMAN

No, not while she's a snake. Before, though, definitely.

MAN looks at WOMAN for a moment; WOMAN tries not to look back, with an embarrassed little girl's smile.

MAN

Is there something you want to tell me?

WOMAN

(coy)

Well, I wasn't planning on it...but I think I'm probably bisexual, yeah...You remember that girl who did my hair at the wedding?

MAN

Yeah...oh wow. When? If you say your bachelorette party, I want that hooker they got me back.

WOMAN

I was 17 or so.

MAN

I politely refused, and she looked so touched...Once?

WOMAN

Twice. Two nights in a row, and never again.

MAN

(after a moment)

So my wife is bisexual. How progressive of me.

WOMAN

I think I am. I think if I wasn't with you, I'd probably be with a woman...Is that OK with you?

MAN

(after a moment)

Well, it's pretty weird to have it dropped on me out of the blue, but I guess it doesn't matter.

WOMAN moves to MAN and kisses him, and moves on top of him.

WOMAN

That's right, it doesn't. I love you, and only you, and you're the only one I want.

They continue to kiss as they speak.

MAN

(smiling)

Of course, this doubles the odds of you cheating on me.

WOMAN

Two times zero is still zero. Need me to prove it?

MAN

Afraid so.

MAN addresses audience while they kiss; he has more difficulty as they grow more passionate, WOMAN working her way downward. LIGHTS FADE TO DARKNESS by MAN's last word.

MAN CONT'D

An illustration might have done the trick.

Exposed a rather glaring casting slip:

I suit the role in every way but one.

I lack equipment; proper parts aren't here...

A spare will do to get you to the shop.

DARKNESS

SET DEPLETED DEN SET

ACT II SCENE 5

BEDROOM, DSL. LIGHTS: INTERIOR AFTERNOON. MAN and WOMAN sit on bed with newspapers spread open around them, pens in hand, looking at papers as they speak.

WOMAN

How many have you found?

MAN

Eight so far. I'll tell you if I find anything worth looking at.

WOMAN

I really liked that job; I can't believe I lost it.

MAN

You didn't lose it. The place closed down. You didn't do anything wrong; the company overextended itself or something.

WOMAN

Well, either way, I don't have a job.

MAN

Well, either way, you don't need a job. Rich husband, remember? I admire the whole Protestant work thing, but you do have the luxury of not getting flustered your first day out.

WOMAN

I get things done when I'm flustered...how far away is this place?

WOMAN points to an ad. MAN leans in to look.

MAN

Too far. I wouldn't even know how to get there.

WOMAN circles the ad.

WOMAN

I can find it...are you mad at me? It seems like ever since the other day when I told you about...

MAN

(after a moment)

Oh, about your pagan lusts?

WOMAN

(wry smile)

Yeah, that.

MAN

Honestly, I haven't given it a second thought.

WOMAN

(surprised, concerned)

You mean that?

MAN

(after a moment)

Yeah.

WOMAN

Well, that's not normal. You should be more in touch with the situation.

MAN

(smiling)

Perhaps, but it's too late to do anything now.

WOMAN reaches over and pinches the back of his arm, under his biceps, with a twisting motion.

MAN yells in very real pain.

MAN

God dammit, what is wrong with you? I've told you not to do that — it hurts! I was kidding, for Christ's sake!

MAN pulls his shirt sleeve up to reveal a black bruise.

MAN CONT'D

(genuinely surprised)

Holy shit, look at what you did!

WOMAN doesn't take him seriously until she sees the bruise. When she does, she breaks into hysterics.

WOMAN

Oh my God, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to, I didn't do it on purpose, I'm so sorry...

MAN looks at her apprehensively for a moment, then calms down and sits, rubbing his arm.

MAN

It's all right. But you're never going to do it again, right?

WOMAN lays against him, calmer, still crying.

WOMAN

(sincerely)

I promise. I'm so sorry. I really didn't mean to hurt you.

They are silent for a moment.

WOMAN CONT'D

Did you mean what you said before about not being upset about me?

MAN

Yeah. I did.

WOMAN leans forward and kisses MAN on forehead, as though kissing him goodbye, then goes back to looking for ads.

MAN rises, moves to DSC, and addresses audience.

LIGHTS FADE ON WOMAN AS MAN SPEAKS.

MAN

I did not lie. I trusted her. My wife.

The one thing people said, once time had passed

Enough to speak the truth: they wondered why

She tried so hard, or what it was she thought

Undone, that she was so hardpressed to prove...

Like Martha Stewart at Christmas: everything

Was made by hand, and plainly labeled so...

Employee of the Year, perennial...

She climbed the ladders like they burned beneath.

Some things took time to grow.

MAN rubs his arm.

MAN CONT'D

But grow they did.

DARKNESS

SET OFFICE SET DSR.

"Well I don't know babe
If you have ever been told,
But you're a tough one to play for.
I tried to be what you were looking for,
I'm not sure if you ever really knew."

Lloyd Cole

ACT III SCENE 1

LIGHTS: INTERIOR, DAY, BUT ODDLY HARSH. BEDROOM, DSL. Standing face to face, but with MAN keeping a wary distance. WOMAN's eyes are black with rage, and she holds MAN's notebook. Raised voices. She slams the book to the floor between them, with a roar of frustration.

MAN

Look, it's just one more semester, then I'll be done. And it's not like we don't have enough money, or there's anything you want that you don't have...is there?

WOMAN moves to MAN. Capitalized words are punctuated with a shove to both MAN's shoulders. MAN tries to avoid her, but with little success, and is too proud to simply run.

WOMAN

But it's NOT what you SAID you were GOING to DO, is it?

MAN

No, it's not, but I didn't know I was going to have a chance to get published, did I? Christ, you were the one who talked me into submitting in the first place!

WOMAN

You know I didn't know it would mean you'd spend another fucking semester in school, when we could be moving to be near my family. You know I'm not happy here.

MAN

What did you think it would mean — you knew I'd have to take this class to get published! That's how it works. We'll go as soon as we can, but I can't commute from 800 miles away.

WOMAN

Don't make FUN of me!

She swings at his face, which he blocks, and takes a few steps backwards.

MAN

(shocked)

You need to calm the hell down before you do something you can't take back.

WOMAN is enraged by this statement, moves quickly forward and attempts to kick MAN in the groin. MAN blocks her kick with both hands, but is hurt by the force of the blow. MAN looks at her with disbelief for a moment, then grows equally angry. MAN moves quickly and aggressively toward WOMAN, but does not make a threatening movement.

MAN

GET OFF ME!

WOMAN freezes for a moment when she sees the look in his eyes, then takes a step back away from him. She breaks down in hysterical tears.

WOMAN

Oh my god, oh my god, you were going to hit me, oh my god...

WOMAN runs weeping OFFSTAGE LEFT.

MAN watches her go, stares in her direction for a moment, then slowly turns to audience. He opens his mouth to speak, then just offers a bewildered half-shrug and turns away, implying he is unable to speak due to lack of notebook.

DARKNESS

LIGHTS: INTERIOR, DIM, IDENTICAL LEVELS AS ACT 1 SCENE 1. DEPLETED DEN SET, CENTER STAGE. *MAN sits on arm of sofa, as in first scene, with WOMAN sleeping. MAN's notebook is on the floor beside him, an open beer atop it. MAN hold a pair of comedy/tragedy masks glued back to back in his hand. He spins them on his knee as he speaks.*

MAN

An hour later...nothing had occurred.

At some point in these days; I don't know when,

A simple thought was pounded home in me:

A truth untold; a thing I would not see.

One unacknowledged, left to stand apart,

Not jibing with my things that had to be.

For as illusions whittled down to nubs,

No doubt remained. I let time pass in hope

What was would come again. But she was gone.

And who remained, I knew, deep down, would be

Just every bit and every way there is,

As fine a mother as she was a wife...

Pause; takes drink. MAN STANDS AND WALKS TO DSC, LOOKING AROUND.

The limits of this place present themselves;

I can't force home the fact these scenes are but

A taste, a sip from days repeated time

And time again, conglomerated now

Into the best of worst, and best of best.

MAN finishes his beer, but for one last sip, which he deliberately pours on the stage in front of him, watching until it stops dripping. LIGHTING MUST HERE ALLOW POUR ON

TOWEL.

It stops...but were the bottle bottomless,
 And time's slow pace as well unnatural,
 The floor would break; the earth itself make way.
 Consistency will carve a canyon's walls,
 When given endless substance with to work.

DARKNESS

RESET FULL DEN SET. [LIGHTING ABOVE MUST ALLOW MAN TO POUR ON TOWEL.]

ACT III, SCENE 2

"You promised me everything,
 You promised me thick and thin, yeah,
 Now you just say, 'Oh Romeo, yeah,
 You know I used to have a scene with him.'
 Juliet, when we made love, you used to cry. . ."

Dire Straits

LIGHTS: DIM, LATE NIGHT/EARLY MORNING. BEDROOM, DSL. We see MAN and WOMAN in bed under the covers, WOMAN almost entirely turned away from MAN. Clearly an immediately post-intimate moment. WOMAN is in tears throughout scene, to various degrees.

MAN

(gently)
 Hey...Aw, angel, not again. What's wrong?

WOMAN

(crying, turning away from him)
 Nothing.

MAN

You sure? It looks there might be.

WOMAN

Nothing's wrong.

MAN

Then why are you crying? That's kind of a sign something's wrong.

WOMAN breaks down sobbing.

MAN

(at first sincere, then
obviously gently joking,
reaching for her)

Honey, my god...Come on, please tell me. Whatever it is, we can fix it...Are you worried I might not have been satisfied?

WOMAN

(laughing/crying; pushes
him away)

Yeah, that was it.

MAN

Well, then what's going on? I don't know why you think...I don't understand why you think there's anything you can't tell me. All I want to do is help.

WOMAN cries harder again.

MAN CONT'D

(reaching for her)

Come here.

WOMAN, still crying, pulls away.

MAN CONT'D

Whatever it is, we can either fix it or at least make it as better as it can be...I love you.

WOMAN turns to him, puts her arms around his neck, looks into his eyes. She is about to tell him something, then changes her mind.

WOMAN JUMPS OUT OF BED, RUNS WEEPING OFFSTAGE LEFT, but stops halfway and turns to MAN.

WOMAN

(earnestly)

I do love you, baby...I do love you too.

MAN watches her exit, and after a moment addresses audience from bed.

MAN

Inflection. Emphasis. The actor's arts
Of subtlety. To say one thing, and mean
Another. God, four words! A simple phrase,
Less frequent in its use as time went by.

"I love you" leaves no room — it's true, or not.

"I do love you" undoes itself — it cloaks

An element within the words, it hides

The smallest print upon the bottom line...

There were but two — that's even odds, at least...

"I do love you" was not addressed to me.

Pause

The desperation of a butterfly,

Not recognizing what it has become...

She'd once convinced herself. That time had passed.

MAN looks to the direction WOMAN exited.

LIGHTS FADE QUICKLY TO DARKNESS

ACT III SCENE 3

LIGHTS: INTERIOR, MID-AFTERNOON. FULL DEN SET, CS. *MAN and WOMAN sit on sofa, MAN reading book, WOMAN leafing through magazine, smoking.*

Can we talk?

WOMAN

Sure...why, what's wrong?

MAN

(a little warily)

Nothing's wrong...I just want to see how you feel about something.

WOMAN

OK...What is it?

MAN

WOMAN takes deep breath.

Well, this job is really working out for me, and I think I can really go places up there — everybody really likes me; I'm in good with all my managers and all...I just don't want to put in all that work and then...

WOMAN

Pause

MAN

And then what...have to quit if you get pregnant?

WOMAN

(quietly, ashamed, small
voice)

Yeah. I...

She cries quietly for a moment. MAN stands, exhales, and makes his way toward her.

MAN

Well, it's not really my call to make, is it? If you want to wait a couple of years, it's OK. You're the one who was so terrified about not having kids before you were 30.

WOMAN

(earnestly)

Oh, I still will. I just want to...wait a while, and see where this job takes me. It's a really great chance, and I just don't want to let it slip away.

MAN

So we wait.

Pause

WOMAN

You're not mad at me?

MAN

I'm a little disappointed, but this'll give me time to find a decent job with insurance and all that.

WOMAN

(slowly)

Well, what if I took care of all that, and you stayed home and worked on your writing. It's what you really want, and I don't mind working.

MAN

(confused; after a moment)

What I want is what we've said we were going to do all along. I don't really care who's working, who isn't...money isn't an issue.

WOMAN

(after a moment)

What if I can't?

MAN

(knowing what she means,
but has to ask)

Can't what?

WOMAN

What if I can't have kids...you know I'm not...healthy.

MAN puts his hand on WOMAN's hand.

MAN

We'll cross that bridge if we come to it. And I said "if."

WOMAN

It'd be OK with you if we had to adopt?

MAN is quiet for a moment, goes back to his reading, does not look up again until she is gone.

MAN

I'd be disappointed. But I'd get over it.

WOMAN

(quietly, triumphantly)

No you wouldn't. And you'd blame me.

WOMAN RISES AND EXITS STAGE RIGHT INTO DARKNESS.

MAN ADDRESSES AUDIENCE, MOVING SLOWLY TO DSC.

MAN

(tired, drained)

For every time I spoke the truth to her,

It seemed that something monstrous had been said...

So this my rock to roll, and she the peak...

Or she the rock, and peace the peak, who knows. . .

Rock crushes flat; I run around behind,

Begin again...To whip the ether, pail

The ocean dry, or change a human soul...

OTHER MAN AND OTHER WOMAN ENTER STAGE LEFT AS WOMAN REENTERS OPPOSITE. THEY MAKE THEIR WAY TO CENTER STAGE TOWARD MAN, CIRCLING HIM SEVERAL TIMES, THEIR STEPS FOLLOWING THE BEAT OF MAN'S LINES.

That stone he rolled not once said, 'I love you'.

But if it had, inflection probably

Would not have caught his ear. He'd shoved that rock

(MORE)

MAN (cont'd)

Against that slope a thousand years. If it
Spoke up, he'd hear the words, but not intent:

OTHER MAN AND OTHER WOMAN STAND SIDE BY SIDE, OPPOSITE WOMAN, HOLDING HANDS, THEIR BACKS TO MAN. BOTH TAKE WOMAN BY THE HAND, FORMING A TRIANGLE AROUND MAN AS HE CONTINUES SPEAKING, COINCIDING WITH HIS FINAL LINE.

Sheer novelty at times, can cloud the mind.

LIGHTS FADE TO DARKNESS

"So listen to your heart that beats,
And follow it with both your feet,
For as you walk, and as you breathe,
You ain't no friend to me."

Lyle Lovett

ACT III SCENE 4

LIGHTS: DAYTIME, OFFICE ENVIRONMENT, SLIGHTLY ARTIFICIAL. OFFICE SET, DSR. WOMAN and OTHER MAN working together, flirting silently. OTHER MAN is as grungy in appearance as one can be in an office environment. WOMAN uses every excuse to move close to OTHER MAN. MAN wanders near, but does not enter, from DSC, watching and speaking to audience.

MAN

She told me of some guy across the room.

At home. Together. After work. At night.

She said he didn't bathe. She laughed at him.

She was in love — but not with him...or me.

WOMAN

I like what you did on that poster — it was really artistic.

OTHER MAN

Maybe that's why they turned it down...how's things at home?

WOMAN

All he does is lie around and write enough to say he's done something...I really don't want to think about it. I meant what I said, I really like your work...Do you do any on your own time...At home?

OTHER MAN does slight double take, looks at WOMAN with fresh interest. WOMAN smiles back, and they mime conversation.

She then makes her way over to OTHER WOMAN'S desk as MAN speaks, cued by "Unthinkable."

MAN

There is some comfort in the knowledge that

Indeed — that extant is one dumb as me.

The standard I set broke so soon...So soon.

As he was there, and privy to events

Past my imagination in those days;

Beyond my powers of conception, then.

Unthinkable thoughts tend to slip the mind.

WOMAN

Wow, that's really pretty. I wish I could get my stuff to look the way I see it in my head.

OTHER WOMAN

You shouldn't worry too much. You've moved up faster in this place than anybody I've ever seen — here or anywhere else, for that matter.

WOMAN

That's just cause I bust my ass...you're the one who does the best work.

OTHER WOMAN

That's nice of you to say, but I'm really not any better than you. You worry too much, that's all.

WOMAN

I don't know, maybe you're right...So what are you doing tonight?

OTHER WOMAN

Got no plans yet. Why?

WOMAN

(deep breath, bravely)

Well, I was wondering what would happen if we tried something together. It's been a while since I. . .worked with someone, but...who knows? We might make something happen.

OTHER WOMAN

(after a moment)

I work better by myself, I've found. No offense, that's just the way it is.

WOMAN

No, that's okay. It was just an idea.

WOMAN EXITS STAGE RIGHT.

MAN

(affected accent where appropriate; more than a little sarcasm and anger)

You know, I'm just a simple Southern boy:

My expectations not beyond the norm.

The kids we named the second day we met,
I'd actually come to know. My wife would be
The friend she swore she'd be, so wordlessly

And easily; like less was not ordained,
For soulmates destined, joined, since time began.

WOMAN REENTERS; MOVES TO OTHER MAN.

WOMAN CONT'D

(softly, aware)

Tonight.

OTHER MAN is slightly surprised, but then smiles and nods, and goes back to his work. WOMAN goes back to her desk.

MAN walks over to WOMAN's desk, sits on the edge as he speaks.

MAN exhales.

Romantics: get 'em up against the wall...

(*Sing-song last six words a la Pink Floyd.*)

DARKNESS

STRIKE OFFICE PERMANENTLY

ACT IV SCENE 1

"This couch trip's getting old,
Tell me how long has it been,
'Cause five years is forever
And you haven't grown up yet."

W. A. Rose

LIGHTS: RISE SLOWLY; EARLY EVENING. BEDROOM SET DSL. MAN lies prone on bed, appearing numb. WOMAN stomps around the room. She pauses briefly, looking at MAN, before speaking.

WOMAN

So lie there. It's all you do anyway. I'm getting my stuff, and I'm driving home.

She looks at MAN, who does not respond, or even seem to hear her.

WOMAN CONT'D

I don't know why I've stayed this long...I should have left the first time, but I let you talk me into staying... You're like dealing with a little kid, and you're never going to grow up, I have to accept that.

MAN

(distantly)

You are home. And it's 800 miles away.

WOMAN

No, I'm not. Home doesn't feel this way.

MAN

Mine never did before.

WOMAN

(bristling)

Before what? Before we met? What the fuck were you before we met? Just some wannabe without the drive to...

MAN

(interrupting quietly)

Talented wannabe.

WOMAN

(earnestly, but angrier)

God yes! But if you don't use it, what's the point?

MAN

(waits a beat)

I'm starting to wonder about that myself.

WOMAN flies into a rage at this, throwing whatever she can get her hands on, and cursing MAN at the top of her lungs. MAN STEPS OUT OF THE SCENE; MOVES TO DSC, ADDRESSING AUDIENCE AFTER A FEW STEPS. WOMAN CONTINUES AS THOUGH HE WERE STILL PRESENT, THEN RETURNING TO PACKING.

MAN CONT'D

There is a piece I can't provide: the why.

The why she cried, and why she kicked and hit,

And screamed and yelled, then left and still came back...

WOMAN PUTS A FEW MORE THINGS IN HER SUITCASE, AND STOPS, SEEMING TO RECONSIDER. SHE IS OBVIOUSLY TORN THROUGHOUT REMAINDER OF SCENE, AND ENDS UP REFOLDING WHAT SHE THREW ON BED.

For it began before we met; there was

A break, a pause, and that is where I fell:

Between two peaks that frame a valley's floor,

Not privy to the echoes that she heard.

No doubt you think it owed to you somehow,

To *understand* what made her act this way.

I know; my God, I felt the same myself

A time...but then the feeling passed me by.

MAN is quiet for a moment.

That denouement, it's still denied as yet,

A knot yet tied; best likely left as such.

I stand by who she once was. What it took

To tear that down, I'd probably best not know.

MAN pauses, struggling for words, then flips quickly through the pages of his notebook, finding a line.

"The truth's utility stands in direct

Proportion to acknowledgment of life's

Obscenities." In other words, the things

We "know" depend upon what we accept —

A possibility that goes ignored

Is set beyond the range of self defense.

Events which crawl too low will slip right past.

So what shaped her: such things...I need not know,

As my white flag went up some years ago.

Why face the beast when maiden fair's long gone?

DARKNESS

SET OTHER WOMAN'S APARTMENT DSR

ACT IV SCENE 2

"Planet earth is blue
And there's nothing I can do."

David Bowie

LIGHTS: INTERIOR, MID-AFTERNOON. OTHER WOMAN'S APARTMENT, DSR. Furniture is covered by tarps, and paint cans are scattered about the room.

OTHER WOMAN ENTERS SL, SPEAKING, WITH WOMAN BEHIND HER. They fiddle with painting equipment as they talk.

OTHER WOMAN

It's really nice of you to help, but I think it's pretty much covered. It's not like it's hard to slap paint on a wall. I wish I'd known you were coming; I'd have bought some beer or wine.
(after an uncomfortable
silence)

I guess we can work this afternoon, then all go get something to eat later, if you want.

WOMAN

(awkwardly seductive)
Sounds good. I'd kind of like...not to go home if I don't have to.

OTHER WOMAN

(oblivious)
Still not getting better, huh?

WOMAN

(crestfallen)
No, and I don't think things will until I...

OTHER WOMAN

Until what?

WOMAN

I don't know. Things just aren't the way I expected them to be, the way they're supposed to be.

OTHER WOMAN

Well, he doesn't do anything like...hit you, or make you do things you don't want to, does he?

WOMAN

Oh no, God no, he'd never do anything like that...he just doesn't do *anything* anymore. He just sits around all day, and I just get so frustrated that I yell at him, so all we do is fight.

OTHER WOMAN

Marriage is tough. It's an unnatural condition...Give me a second; I'm going to see where the paint thinner ended up.

WOMAN nods, and OTHER WOMAN EXITS UPSTAGE RIGHT. WOMAN looks around for a moment, then stirs a can of paint.

SIGNIFICANT OTHER ENTERS DSR, wearing apron, seeming almost grandmotherly.

SIGNIFICANT OTHER

Hello. You must be the one from work I've heard so much about.

WOMAN

(surprised, but huge friendly smile, back in perfect world)

Oh hi, nice to meet you.

SIGNIFICANT OTHER

You two seems to be getting pretty close.

WOMAN

Yeah, yes...

Uncomfortable silence.

SIGNIFICANT OTHER

Can I get you something to drink?

WOMAN

Oh, no thank you, I'm fine. Yeah, we spend pretty much all day together, and we really have a good time. I don't know what it is — we just clicked, I guess.

SIGNIFICANT OTHER

That's what I hear...You're married, aren't you?

WOMAN

Yes. About eight years now.

SIGNIFICANT OTHER

Hmm. So you're overdue for that seven year itch, huh?

WOMAN

(surprised, flustered, but maintains)

I guess I could be, but I'm not. I mean...I would never do that.

SIGNIFICANT OTHER

Well, I hope that's the case.

SIGNIFICANT OTHER EXITS WHERE SHE ENTERED. WOMAN watches her go, taken aback by what was said, but silent.

OTHER WOMAN REENTERS WHERE SHE EXITED.

OTHER WOMAN

So you ready to get at it?

WOMAN

(initially shocked)

What...Oh, yeah, sure...Is your Mom really religious or something?

OTHER WOMAN

My Mom? I don't know, could be. We don't speak. I haven't seen her in years. Why in the world do you...oh.

WOMAN

(after a moment,
mortified)

OH. Oh God, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to...Oh god.

OTHER WOMAN

(smiling)

It's OK, it's OK — she can be kind of territorial. She's convinced I'm going to end up with someone younger. That's why I said marriage can be tough — we're dealing with that right now, tomorrow it'll be something else. You're OK long as you both love each other. She didn't get in your face, did she?

WOMAN

No, no...well yes, but I think I kind of...I think I maybe should just head out.

OTHER WOMAN

You sure? I thought you wanted to talk about what was going on at home.

WOMAN

(deep breath; huge smile;
things couldn't be
better)

No, it's OK. I probably make it sound a lot worse than it is. I'll be fine, I was just blowing off steam. I'll see you tomorrow, right?

WOMAN exits hurriedly, trying to maintain composure.

OTHER WOMAN

Yeah. Bye.

OTHER WOMAN begins to "paint", CS, facing UPSTAGE, "obscuring" sofa.

MAN enters, watches OTHER WOMAN paint.

MAN

I'm fairly open-minded, when my mind
Is not required to bend around a turn
That vows and ethics said could not arise...
The "what" is not the thing, nor even "why."
It's "how" that keeps me up at night yet still...
So ethically...there dwells my healthy hate.
As never did I dream she'd hide herself. . .

LIGHTS FADE TO DARKNESS DURING FINAL LINE

My mind stood fast: refused delivery.

STRIKE OTHER WOMAN'S APARTMENT.

ACT IV SCENE 3

LIGHTS: INTERIOR AFTERNOON. MAN and WOMAN sit IN FULL DEN, CS. Both appear subdued, beaten. WOMAN lights a cigarette. LIGHTS slowly dim on the scene.

DARKNESS

LIGHTS RISE AGAIN (PRECISELY AS SLOWLY) on the same scene, only with WOMAN lying face up on sofa, smoking and reading a magazine, and MAN slumped slightly further in his chair. LIGHTS AGAIN SLOWLY DIM.

DARKNESS

LIGHTS RISE AGAIN ON THE SAME SCENE, with WOMAN face down on sofa with magazine on floor. MAN is slumped even further in the chair.

MAN

I got published.

There is no response from WOMAN; MAN looks at her for a moment and realizes she is asleep.

(MORE)

MAN (cont'd)

He stands, and takes the cigarette from her hand, and gently puts it out in tray on table.

LIGHTS DIM TO DARKNESS ON FULL DEN SET, *but follow MAN as he moves to D S C.*

MAN

This hindsight far transcends mere clarity;

These memories are recipes that I

Prepared; ingredients I grew myself,

Then found the earth below was rotten soil,

What crops grown here, unfit to be consumed.

And every night I filled my plate with more.

Which is a wordy way to say that I

Fucked up. I dropped my guard, and I got clocked.

Pause

So many moments love — whatever blocked

My brain — if it had simply stepped aside

Ten seconds worth of time...I'd like to think

There might have been a clicking sound — watch this:

LIGHTS RISE SUDDENLY ON FULL DEN SET

MAN MOVES QUICKLY OVER TO WOMAN, SEATED AS BEFORE. MAN can feel free to be a bit sarcastically self-aware with his lines here, as they are means to an end he already knows. He is unnaturally emotive at beginning, but gradually beaten down by end.

MAN

Hey sweetie, how's work been going?

WOMAN

(slightly embarrassed by
end)

It's been so much fun, I made friends with that girl who was so mean to me on my first day, but then I started talking to her, and got to know her, and well...I don't know how to put it, we just clicked, kind of the way you and I did...I don't know what I mean.

MAN

Well, that's good; sounds like you made a friend.

WOMAN

Yeah, we've got a lot in common. She's really smart, and pretty too...I think she's gay.

MAN

An artist? Imagine that.

WOMAN

Don't make fun of her.

MAN

(bluntly, not smiling)

I'm not. How can I make fun of lesbians? We share the same tastes.

MAN here emotionally mouths WOMAN's final line.

WOMAN

(not really listening)

Make fun of the guy next to us who never takes a shower, we do...I don't know how to put it. I just really love being around her. I love her; she reminds me of myself.

MAN nods with painful awareness, and walks back to previous position DSC. LIGHTS DIM ON FULL DEN SET AS HE WALKS. HE REACHES DOWN CENTER STAGE, hits self twice on chest with fists: sardonic, gleeful sarcasm.

MAN

(loudly)

"IN APPREHENSION, HOW LIKE A GOD!"

MAN shakes head; takes a deep breath, as LIGHTS GO DOWN ON WOMAN.

MAN CONT'D

So this went on. And on. And on...And on.

And I, uncomfortably numb, played through.

What had to be was not, what was, was wrong.

What once was right all fell to hell; yet on,

And on I stood. You watch such waters long

And hard enough, you'll see yourself float by.

DARKNESS

SET OTHER MAN'S PARTY DSR.

ACT IV, SCENE 4

"Don Quixote had his windmills
 Ponce de Leon took his cruise
 Took Sinbad seven voyages
 To realize it was all a ruse."

Warren Zevon

LIGHTS: NIGHT, BUT ONLY UPPER TORSOS VISIBLE. CAR, DSC. MAN driving. An extremely heavy silence.

MAN

(after a few moments)

Are you sure you still want to go? You've been feeling bad all day.

WOMAN

(ignoring him)

You've lived here your whole fucking life. How can you not know where this street is?

MAN

It sounds familiar; it has to be here somewhere. Jesus, you're the one giving the directions.

They indicate car has stopped.

WOMAN

Great. Perfect. Why do you always pull up so far that you don't trigger the light? We're going to be here for...

MAN'S smile and WOMAN'S silence help indicate light has changed.

MAN

You were saying something?

WOMAN

(fuming visibly)

Fuck off.

MAN

(trying to make peace)

We are going to a party, do you think we could stop fighting for...

WOMAN

(interrupting)

Do you think you could learn to drive a goddamn car in the goddamn city where you were fucking born without wasting three hours...

MAN

(interrupting, yelling)

Jesus God! Do you want to just go home? Or I'll drop you off at the party and go, but you need to calm the hell down...

WOMAN

(stoically, after a moment)

No.

MAN

No what? No, you don't want me to go home, drop you off, what? Christ, you can't just freak out for no reason and expect me to want to be around you.

WOMAN

(after a moment, staring straight ahead)

No, I want you to come with me. I want you to come to the party. You need to get out and see things...instead of sitting home all the time.

They are quiet for a moment.

MAN

I know where it is.

MAN reaches down to adjust stereo; WOMAN slaps his hand away.

WOMAN

Don't turn that thing back on; I hate Lyle Lovett.

MAN

(After staring at her for a second, genuinely shocked. With utmost sincerity; the beginning of realization.)

You are seriously disturbed.

WOMAN

I think it's back behind us — the directions...

MAN

I said I know where it is.

WOMAN

(voice rising steadily)

The directions say it should be back where we were...

Their bodies indicate a hard and sudden turn is made, followed by an abrupt braking.

MAN

(loud and angry; at the
same time reasoning
desperately)

Look! Can't you see the signs? They have the same name on them
as the name of the street we are looking for! I was right, and
the directions were wrong...

A moment passes as he drives into parking lot.

MAN CONT'D

What apartment does this guy live in?

WOMAN

(too quickly, without
looking)

18B. It's on the left. Don't park under the carport. They'll tow
you.

DARKNESS

LIGHTS: INTERIOR NIGHT, OTHER MAN'S PARTY DSR.

*MAN stands center stage, DIMLY LIT. WOMAN, smiling as though
absolutely nothing had happened, greets people in OTHER MAN'S
APARTMENT, DSR. OTHER MAN ENTERS DSR, CARRYING TWO BEERS; HE AND
WOMAN LOCKING EYES BEFORE HE IS EVEN VISIBLE. THEY MOVE TOWARD
EACH OTHER, AND SPEAK QUIETLY.*

MAN

For months I missed what lay behind this rage;

My naiveté, for once, here served me well —

Smiling almost happily

I drove her almost mad without a thought.

Smile disappears as he speaks

And madder still she grew, until she knew

That I, in some unconscious self-defense,

Would never see what was so obvious.

Love may be blind, but also dumb and deaf,

When what arises just can't be the case.

*WOMAN stands talking to OTHER MAN. Others mill about. MAN walks
near them, and sits on floor, looking up at them, drinking.*

*OTHER WOMAN ENTERS SL FROM DARKNESS, WALKS OVER AND GREETES MAN,
THEN WALKS INTO SCENE DSR, GREETING WOMAN AND THEN MIMING
CONVERSATION.*

MAN CONT'D

Now here, I redefine oblivious.

Pathetic in its purity, my faith.

So here I sat. Some small talk, more bad beer...

WOMAN WALKS PAST MAN, IGNORING HIM, SL INTO DARKNESS.

My trust in her was absolute. Misplaced,

Of course — that I'm the fool has been set down...

*OTHER MAN notices MAN; their eyes lock. MAN gets up and shakes
OTHER MAN'S hand. OTHER MAN then FOLLOWS WOMAN SL.*

Pause, drinks.

There is no absolute. There's always change.

And not a thing can never but occur.

Pause, drinks.

*MAN moves DSC speaking; OW moves USC out of scene; LIGHTS DIM TO
ONLY SHOW MAN.*

I wanted to believe; believe I did.

Thus I, would never ask. The

burden fell

To her to speak: thank god for telephones.

DARKNESS

*LIGHTS: INTERIOR, NIGHT. BEDROOM SET DSL. MAN LIES ALONE IN BED.
APARTMENT PARTY SCENE STILL INTACT DSR. WOMAN APPEARS TO BE TRYING
TO LEAVE UNNOTICED, BUT OTHER MAN ENTERS SR; THEY AWKWARDLY COME
TOGETHER, HE SEEMING TO COMFORT HER.*

Still this went on. And on. But then, one night...

Long pause

So here I lay, and wondered where she was.

MAN turns and stares over at WOMAN and OTHER MAN.

This blindness, now incomprehensible,
 Is foreign to my mind as concepts not
 Conceived: not only not believed, unknown.

*OTHER MAN TAKES WOMAN BY HAND, THEY WALK OFFSTAGE SR, LIGHTS DIM
 TO DARKNESS ON APARTMENT PARTY SCENE. MAN WATCHES THEM AS THEY
 GO.*

That such a thing could be, it stands against
 My reason. How could I not see? The signs
 Piled up around me; I might trip on one
 From time to time...oblivious as one
 Miscast; a role without a script, no hope
 For subtext, motivation or response,
 From one who does not know he's in the play...
 Much less the failings of the playwright's mind.

*LIGHTS RISE AGAIN ON APARTMENT SCENE; BRIGHTER, DAYTIME; OTHER MAN
 AND WOMAN reenter. CLOTHING INDICATES TIME HAS PASSED AND SEX TOOK
 PLACE. OTHER MAN tries to kiss WOMAN good-bye, she halfheartedly
 returns it, and EXITS DSL.*

*MAN stands and paces, then chases OM as he departs, almost
 catching him.*

Now here, we pause, reflect, and note the fact
 That he is not a she. This casts some doubt,
 Perhaps; it begs a question, logically:
 "If she's so gay, what's with the guy who smells?"
 Remember, I had ringside seats. I know.
 It's funny now; absurd without a doubt...
 But not upon that night my wife betrayed
 What little good remained...such stupid faith.

Pause

Yet contrast to her shame, for me to know,

A hard-earned certainty. Behind the tears,
The way she knew she should feel, was a calm.

A calculating satisfaction, too.

When she lay down with him, she broke what was.

I'm sure she felt relief — the die was cast.

To give a damn for me; what would that say

Of her? No room for sympathy against

Oneself — can't justify while looking down.

DARKNESS

STRIKE APARTMENT SCENE.

SET COSTUME TRUNK BEHIND BED.

ACT IV SCENE 5

"O that I were
Upon the hill of Basan to outroar
The horned herd! For I have savage cause,
And to proclaim it civilly were like
A haltered neck which does the hangman thank
For being yare about him."

Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*

LIGHTS: INTERIOR AFTERNOON. BEDROOM SET, DSL. WOMAN strips sheets off bed. OTHER WOMAN enters SL. WOMAN, throughout the scene, is gradually beaten down by OTHER WOMAN's good intentions, going from fairly upbeat to dark frustration by end.

WOMAN

Hey, I didn't hear you knock. You get my e-mail?

OTHER WOMAN

Yeah. And if you're sleeping with someone else, it's pretty safe to say your marriage is over...unless you have a husband who's freakishly understanding.

WOMAN

I just can't believe it came to this.

OTHER WOMAN

Yeah, me either.

WOMAN

I was just so sure he was the one, that we'd be together forever, all that stuff...How do I tell him?

OTHER WOMAN

(after a moment)

You tell him you want a divorce by sitting down with him and telling him. But you don't bring up the other part, there's no point.

WOMAN

(after a moment, slowly)

No, I think I owe him the truth. This is just how it is; he should just know how things really are, so he won't have any false hopes.

OTHER WOMAN

You really ought to think that through, before you do something you can't take back. If you sincerely tell him you want a divorce, he'll get the picture. That'll hurt him bad enough. There's no reason to tell him something that'll only make it worse, is there?

WOMAN

I'll just have to think about it.

OTHER WOMAN

What's to think about? You say you used to care about the man — take my word for it. There's no point in telling him. He'll let it go on his own...if we're going to meet everybody from work, we'd better go.

WOMAN

Let me just stick these in the wash. Fucking spots.

WOMAN AND OTHER WOMAN EXIT SL.

MAN ENTERS PRECISELY AS THEY EXIT, FROM DARKNESS DSC, carrying beer and notebook. He resumes previous position on now-stripped bed, after looking at it for a moment. LIGHTS DIM VERY SLOWLY THROUGHOUT THIS SPEECH, SO THAT BY THE TIME THE PHONE RINGS, IT SEEMS LIKE NIGHT.

MAN

Remaining still: a power over me.

One she could no more let lay idly by

Than ever comprehend what it could mean.

She had to let me know. That's who she is.

Or all that's left. A shadow of what was...

Some rumor of the echo from a dream.

MAN takes drink.

How does one mourn the dead who move about,

Without the decency to be overt,

Display some sign of having passed away.

Reincarnation skipping vital steps...

And mourning grows still harder when the corpse

Is stomping through the house and throwing things...

Such joyless remnants, somehow animate,

That had to let me know just who's in charge.

Phone rings one long ring

Imagine for yourselves the look upon

My face...There still are scenes that I don't show.

*The phone rings again; MAN reaches over and gently hangs it up,
leaving it off the hook.*

That said, reflection does not always hurt.

Though time can't heal, it can reveal the thought

Unbroached. To wit: he screwed my wife. There's that.

It's hard to miss.

*MAN puts his hands beneath the pillow behind his head. He
obviously feels something unexpected, and pulls out a condom
wrapper.*

Ay, there's the rubber! GOD!

*He looks at the wrapper for a moment, then violently tosses it
aside. Speaking with mounting anger.*

But then, as months well spent would make so clear,

Providing basis for comparison...

*Pause, looking for words. MAN downs beer, and opens notebook,
leafing through pages as he speaks.*

To gently voice an untoward thought or two:
 I've been to where he went. And lesbians
 Aren't meant for certain tasks...Ironic and
 Absurd...yet comforting, what he would find:

MAN puts his finger on specific line.

As dry and dead as August firewood cord,
 And mean as April seemed to Eliot.

MAN is quiet for a moment. His voice takes on a new edge.

The fact I knew him gave me pause...a sort
 Of daze where fresh ideas arrived...ideas
 Not entertained before, for lack of need.

The handle of an ax kept floating by...

Then this: *Res ipsa est sua ultio.*

From Cicero: "The thing's its own revenge."

It's motherly advice, almost, but true.

Pause, thinking for a moment.

You'd like a scene that proves this point, that shows

Him realize just what he's let inside...

*He stands, seeming to consider the possibilities, then shakes his
 head.*

You'd find that scene would be redundancy.

Just pull me out and plug him in...but know

He likely had the sense to flee...No love,

No needs...nor hopes to hold too close, too long.

Another pause to think.

An unseen murder here might pace the plot...

A Greek convention often left unused.

MAN STANDS AND MOVES SLOWLY AROUND BED TOWARD OSL.

The stage, the page, provide some room to vent.

Without the logic that restrains and binds

Less flexible, objective memories,

The line between desire and action fades.

MAN pauses to think, puts down beer and notebook, and continues to move.

Conveniently I'd find my way offstage:

Rubbing his hands like a cartoon villain, maybe an English accent. HE COMES ACROSS A TRUNK BEHIND THE BED CONTAINING A BLACK COWBOY HAT AND A BLACK CAPE, AND PUTS BOTH ON. Full villain ensemble.

Revenge most sweet, indelicate and cruel.

MAN MOVES OFFSTAGE LEFT.

You'd hear a shout, like Agamemnon's cry:

OTHER MAN

(offstage, emoting)

God's blood! My sins roost home at last! Alas!

MAN MOVES BACK ONSTAGE, APPEARING ODDLY AMUSED; HE HOLDS AN AX HANDLE.

MAN

Or maybe just a scream.

MAN is suddenly deadly serious.

MAN CONT'D

Less talk, more fear.

MAN STALKS BACK OFFSTAGE.

OTHER MAN

(terrified, pleading, top of his voice)

No, man, wait, she said you were over!

Blows are heard, OTHER MAN screams from offstage; the now bloody ax handle is thrown onstage. MAN REENTERS, DRAGGING BODY TO CENTER STAGE, SPEAKING WITH EFFORT AS HE PULLS.

MAN CONT'D

I'd drag his body right to center stage...

And then provide our moral...here still unknown.

MAN looks down, contemplating body, breathing heavily. He is suddenly deadly serious. He absently pokes body with handle to the beat of first line.

MAN CONT'D

(slowly, measured)

And he'd be dead, but what he did still done.

And whom he did, still just as dead inside.

And truth be told, he was but first in line:

He could have been a thousand other men.

One can't avenge a loss so long since felt.

MAN takes step back from body, then kicks it hard in the head.

MAN gets on bed, assuming position recalling that of WOMAN in Act I, Scene 3.

He's not the only corpse I've kicked tonight.

LIGHTS DIM TO DARKNESS

STRIKE BEDROOM, CONSTRUCT BAR DSL & LAWYER'S OFFICE DSR.

PREPARE DEN SET FOR "MOVING" APPEARANCE.

ACT V SCENE 1

LIGHTS: DAYTIME, OFFICE FEEL. WE SEE MAN CENTER STAGE, CROSSING TO DSR, A LEGAL OFFICE SET, WHILE PUTTING ON COAT AND TIE.

MAN

(as though running late)

And then there was divorce! No circumstance

On earth cannot be worsened: lawyers still

Can play a part in any scene, and add

In numbers, decimals: explain what's black,

What's red: the bottom line of just how dumb

You've been — how much your waste of time will cost.

*MAN REACHES LEGAL OFFICE, shakes LAWYER'S hand, and takes a seat.
LAWYER sits on one side of desk, MAN on the other.*

LAWYER

Let's get the basics out of the way first. The way that divorce works in this state is this: you have to keep mind of the fact that whatever you earned over the term of the marriage is subject to the terms of the divorce, which simply means that half...

Though LAWYER continues speaking, at "... that whatever you" we begin to hear white noise, which grows progressively louder until LAWYER can no longer be heard, though he appears to continue to speak.

MAN is clearly not really listening, sitting with his fist under his chin, and glances over to see WOMAN, OTHER WOMAN, AND OTHER MAN (AGAIN DRESSED AS CHILDREN) ENTER DSR BEHIND LAWYER. WOMAN AND OTHER WOMAN HOLD HANDS; OTHER MAN PULLS THEM ON RED WAGON. WOMAN AND OTHER WOMAN LOOK BACK AT MAN, BUT DO NOT OTHERWISE ACKNOWLEDGE HIM. MAN DOESN'T MOVE, AND MAINTAINS A COMPOSED BUT APPROPRIATELY BEWILDERED EXPRESSION, BUT FOLLOWS THEM WITH HIS EYES UNTIL THEY CIRCLE THE DESK AND JUST ABOVE THE DESK. AT THEIR EXIT, THE WHITE NOISE ABRUPTLY STOPS.

LAWYER

I said, do you understand? Is there anything you'd like me to go over again?

MAN

No, no...all right, so...we're each entitled to half of what was earned in the marriage, no matter what?

LAWYER

It always depends upon what you mean by no matter what.

MAN

(dead serious)

She claimed to be in love with me, married me, fell in love with a woman, and cheated with a man. That doesn't get me some sort of discount?

LAWYER begins to speak; MAN cuts him off.

MAN CONT'D

This doesn't make sense. Most of what money we had was in my name. I'm going to have to pay her for the privilege of...what exactly?

LAWYER

Son, I'm just telling you how it is. That's what you pay me for.

MAN

My God. I'm going to have to write her a check!

LAWYER

(trying to be patient)

You want to talk right and wrong, find a priest — all I can do is explain the rules and try to bend them in your direction.

MAN

Maybe I'll put "My 20's" on that little memo line...

LAWYER sits back in chair.

Pause

MAN CONT'D

Essentially, we're talking about a contract like any other. One party held up its end, and the other party...didn't. Shouldn't there be some kind of...acknowledgment? Hell, just a nod from a judge; it doesn't have to have anything to do with money — just an allowance that I didn't...choose to act like her.

LAWYER

Kiddo, you could be in California, with three kids to divvy up, and alimony for the rest of your life. Hard as it is, count your blessings and try to move on. And thank God above your folks had the sense to put your inheritance in trust. She's only entitled to interest earned.

MAN

(after a moment, defeated)

"Entitled. . ." And what is it I'm entitled to?

LAWYER

Whatever's left. The other half.

MAN

Of what's mine to begin with.

LAWYER sits back in his chair.

MAN CONT'D

(they are quiet for a few moments)

So it's not what you do; it just depends on how long you let it last — how long the meter runs?

LAWYER

In a nutshell.

DARKNESS
STRIKE LAWYER'S OFFICE; SET UP COURTROOM SET.

ACT V SCENE 2

"Why hide what's deep inside me,
Black wings beating, storming the spirit's prow -
Hurricane, slashing hatred!"

Aeschylus

"Lose your dreams and you will lose your mind.
Ain't life unkind?"

Rolling Stones

LIGHTS: DAYTIME. FULL DEN SET (MOVING). WOMAN AND OTHER WOMAN are moving her out. MAN SITS INDIAN-STYLE, BELOW DEAD CENTER, subdued, watching. WOMAN is fuming as she moves around, throwing her things in boxes, but she is all smiles dealing with OTHER WOMAN — the contrast would be comical in other circumstances. She stops as she moves past MAN, speaking so OTHER WOMAN can't hear.

WOMAN

There's no reason for you to be here. Why don't you just go?
There's nothing...

MAN

(quietly, interrupting)
So where's your fella?

WOMAN

What?

MAN

(staring straight ahead,
quiet monotone.)
The guy you're sleeping with tonight. You mentioned him when you last called. Why isn't he here to help? That's the kind of thing a new boyfriend does, isn't it?

WOMAN

(after a moment)
Don't ask questions when you know the answer.

MAN

Yeah, it is kind of rhetorical, I guess. You screw somebody's wife, you get out of having to help her move.

OTHER WOMAN looks at them with a concerned expression, but leaves them be.

WOMAN moves to keel in front of MAN.

WOMAN

(big smile)

Why don't you just shut the fuck up, and get out of here until we're done?

MAN

(honestly considers question)

I don't know. The ship still floats, I guess.

WOMAN looks at MAN for a moment, then walks past MAN to pick up a box.

WOMAN

(to MAN's face)

I'm not crazy...you're not nice.

MAN notices the ring on her finger. He grabs her hand, and looks at her with disbelief.

MAN

(after a moment; rising volume)

Do you wear it while you're fucking him, or does that make you feel funny inside? And when, in eight goddamned years, was I not nice to you? Please, tell me there was one time!

MAN suddenly turns to OTHER WOMAN, as she passes with a box.

MAN cont'd

That's mine.

OTHER WOMAN puts box down near WOMAN. WOMAN is silent for a moment.

WOMAN

(with checkmate expression)

At least with him I feel something. And don't yell at my friends.

WOMAN walks over to OTHER WOMAN, helps her put items in a box.

MAN seethes dangerously for a moment, and stands as though about to address audience. Out of the corner of his eye, hidden beneath some other objects, he sees the bloody ax handle from earlier. He slowly walks over and picks it up and examines it, confused.

AS MAN MOVES LIGHTS DIM TO AN HERETOFORE UNSEEN MIX, INDICATING CONFUSION AND RAGE, to show only MAN and WOMAN. MAN looks over at WOMAN; she no longer seems to see him. MAN takes a step toward WOMAN, then bends and puts handle back where it was found. LIGHTS RETURN TO PREVIOUS.

MAN

(unsteadily)

No. There be dragons...Even maps as cheap

And poorly drawn as mine show where to stop.

MAN pauses for a moment, shaking off previous events, then continues, moving to DSC. The others go about their business, but the LIGHTS slowly fade during following lines until only MAN is visible, and total DARKNESS coincides with his last word.

MAN CONT'D

I loved her ring. Of that, I miss the sight.

She tried to give it back so many times...

Until the day she knew that I'd accept

It. Christ, I gave her mine. She took it, too.

She kept her dress, the rings, the photo books,

The wedding gifts — Miss Havisham might well

Be proud. The bits she left, I do not have...

Pause

It's telling, in its way — who wants to keep
Their memories, and who can't stand the thoughts.

DARKNESS

MOVING PROPS CLEARED OUT; BACK TO NORMAL FULL DEN SET.

"And when the lights came up at two,
I caught a glimpse of you,
And your face looked like
Something Death brought with him in his suitcase.
Your pretty face,
It looked so wasted."

Warren Zevon

LIGHTS: LATE EVENING, SUDDEN AS POSSIBLE. DEN SET, CS. MAN sits on sofa; WOMAN stalks back and forth in front of him.

MAN

(yelling, seeming
desperate to be
reasonable)

God as my witness, I don't even know what we're fighting about! Wait, really, I want to see if I can figure it out: I got home, you got home. I asked how your day went...well, that's pretty much it. So why the hell are you screaming at me?

WOMAN

(seething)

I want to leave. But I don't have anywhere to go. You have places you can go — I don't. You should leave.

MAN

There's logic there. But I don't want to leave...I want to figure out what's wrong, and fix it.

WOMAN

(after a moment)

You can't. It's done.

MAN

(after a moment)

So that's it, huh? We're just doomed, and I should drive to Office Depot, pick up the Do-It-Yourself Divorce kit, and start the paperwork. Is that what you want me to do?

LIGHTS DIM SLIGHTLY, BUT PERCEPTIBLY. WOMAN says nothing, walks to end of sofa, and sits, staring straight ahead, utterly motionless. MAN sits next to her as he speaks.

MAN CONT'D

(quietly)

Is that what you want me to do? I could stop off at Dairy Queen, get a couple of sundaes, and we can eat ice cream and split it all up.

WOMAN remains motionless and silent, staring straight ahead — comatose with open eyes. MAN moves closer, and puts his arm around her shoulders. He jostles her gently.

MAN (CONT'D)

(grows emotional as he
speaks, but maintains)

Ice cream? Split...? I could get sprinkles. Double sprinkles if you like. Hell, you could suck sprinkles out of a cup with a straw while we sign our divorce. It's that or a movie, I guess...I'm just going to get more obnoxious until you say something...OK...

(MORE)

MAN (CONT'D)

Since you chose the wedding announcements, I get to choose the divorce announcements. Do you suppose we have to send people money this time — cash or small appliances? It only seems fair. Well?

MAN gives her a gentle shake. WOMAN reacts like a marionette, her entire body responding to the motion.

MAN CONT'D

Yeah...Sprinkles, stationary, blenders, oh my...Would you just say something, please?

MAN looks at her from the side for a moment, then slowly moves in front of her, staring into her eyes, and kneels in front of her. He takes her hands, and holds them up for a moment, then lets them fall. WOMAN offers no resistance.

MAN CONT'D

OK, no joke, I need you to say something now. Tell me to fuck off, kick me, whatever...I'll go for a ride if you want, give you some time to cool off from whatever it is...sorry. Look, whatever it is, we can make it better, but you have to tell me.

MAN looks into her eyes again, then suddenly snaps his fingers an inch away from her cheek. No response.

MAN CONT'D

(frightened)

I don't know what you're doing, but I'm asking you, please stop it. Please.

MAN rises, and paces back in front of her twice.

MAN CONT'D

(suddenly, top of his voice)

STOP IT!

WOMAN offers no response, continuing to stare, expressionless, straight ahead. MAN looks again into her eyes, and lays her down gently. MAN gets a blanket, covers her, and kneels beside WOMAN, crying softly.

FADE TO DARKNESS. THEN "THE SUN RISES."

LIGHTS: DAWN. WOMAN IS NOT IN THE ROOM. SHE ENTERS FROM OFFSTAGE LEFT, AS MAN AWAKENS.

WOMAN

Morning honey, I wasn't sure if I should wake you or not. Why don't we go downtown and look through those antique stores — maybe we could find an armoire, or a sofa table for the living room.

MAN JUST LOOKS AT HER AS SHE EXITS WHERE SHE ENTERED.

DARKNESS

ACT V, SCENE 3

LIGHTS: INTERIOR MORNING. MAN stands before JUDGE's bench, DSR, a few yards away, speaking with LAWYER. MAN and LAWYER wear suits; JUDGE wears robe of office; he has his head down, writing. LAWYER carries a file of papers. MAN struggles to maintain composure throughout — he is not initially about to break down; then he is merely stoic, but by the end is making a visible effort.

LAWYER

Looks like we're next after all. You ready?

MAN slightly nods affirmatively

LAWYER

This'll be over before you know it, and you can get back to your life, and never need give her a second thought...is she going to come today?

MAN

(softly, staring straight ahead)

No. I said I'd handle it. How long will it take?

LAWYER

(reacts with silent disgust to idea of WOMAN not appearing)

Five, maybe ten minutes at the most. Depends on how much time the judge has on his hands, more than anything else. Actually, you got lucky...

JUDGE notices LAWYER.

JUDGE

Well, I'll be...how've you been?

LAWYER approaches bench, shakes hands with JUDGE, and hands him the file of paperwork.

JUDGE

(rifling papers)

Everything looks fine...let's get you out of here, son. Have you been a resident of this county for three years?

MAN

(after a moment)

Yes...yes, I have.

JUDGE

Is there any reason that I should believe there is chance or opportunity for the issues contained in this request for divorce before me to be resolved, or any future chance whatsoever for reconciliation?

MAN

(after a moment)

No...no there's not.

JUDGE

And you wish that a binding legal divorce be granted here today?

MAN

Yes. I do.

WOMAN runs onstage from darkness towards MAN from DSL, wearing her wedding gown and carrying a bouquet. While this happens, LAWYER and JUDGE go on unaware.

WOMAN

(loudly, earnestly)

I'm not gay, I'm not crazy, let's go home and start a family!

MAN takes a step toward her.

DARKNESS

LIGHTS IMMEDIATELY RISE

The situation is as it was before the lights initially lowered, MAN again facing bench.

JUDGE is quiet for a moment, as he signs three papers, and stamps one.

JUDGE

Your divorce is hereby granted, and the court wishes you good luck.

LAWYER begins to say something, but notices MAN's stricken expression. He uncomfortably puts his arm around MAN'S shoulders and pats him twice, as they turn and move away.

LAWYER

You did good. And it's all over.

MAN
 (seeming not to hear him
 for a moment; shakily)
 Oh yeah. Blue skies.

DARKNESS
 STRIKE COURTROOM SET

ACT V SCENE 4

"Not poppy nor mandragora
 Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world
 Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
 Which thou owed'st yesterday."

Shakespeare, *Othello*

"The more I learn,
 The less I know.
 Could you make mine straight Absolut?"

Lloyd Cole

LIGHTS: INTERIOR EVENING, DIM. BAR SCENE, DSL. MAN is seated alone at end, four drinks' drunk. BAR FRIEND enters ABOVE SL, blind and wearing sunglasses, banging his cane (not white) back and forth as he enters the room. BARTENDER pours BAR FRIEND a drink as he walks in, without asking. BARTENDER henceforth wanders in and out occasionally, never speaking.

BAR FRIEND
 (yelling)
 Who's in here?

MAN
 (not looking up)
 Get out! You jack up the insurance rates and my tab gets higher.

BAR FRIEND moves effortlessly to his seat, one removed from MAN, and lights a cigarette.

MAN CONT'D
 I thought you quit.

BAR FRIEND
 I did. But drinking without smoking is like screwing without kissing — deep down, you know it's wrong. . . Still not smiling, huh?

MAN

(smiles dimly, shrugs)

Guess not...Do I still look that bad?

BAR FRIEND

Starting early with the blind jokes, huh? Nah, not like you used to. You've made people get up and leave, you were so damned depressing. It was like watching kittens drown.

MAN

Oh well.

BAR FRIEND

It's been what, three months or so now? Don't tell me everything, for God's sake, but give it to me in a nutshell. Sum it up in ten words.

MAN

(counting off on fingers)

...I married a lesbian...who cheated with...a guy at...I guess that's ten. I should've skipped the pronouns.

BAR FRIEND

You must've been heading towards "work".

MAN

Why? You're right, but it could have been "Our baby's baptism," any number of things.

BAR FRIEND

Nah, you would have known the end was longer than the beginning and made an allowance. Damn. "Oh well" is right.

BAR FRIEND raises his glass to MAN in a toast.

BAR FRIEND cont'd

Shit happens.

MAN touches his glass to his, without looking.

MAN

More often than not.

BAR FRIEND

(after a moment)

Did you know the guy?

MAN

Yep.

BAR FRIEND

Did you pay him a visit, or just sit around and fantasize about killing him?

MAN

(after a moment)

The second thing. It was...remarkably detailed.

BAR FRIEND

Oh yeah. Just the sort of thing that lets you know what a boiling bag of chemicals we really are.

MAN

(after a moment)

Did you ever wonder...who's suffering more at the worst moment — a six-year-old kid who comes home to find out his dog was hit by a car, or...Hamlet when the Ghost tells him how he died?

BAR FRIEND

No, I can't say as I've wondered that...Guess it depends on what you mean by suffering.

MAN

I don't think it does. One says, "Oh, my prophetic soul," the other says, "What? Where is he? I want to play." One can at least understand, has the benefit of words to express himself, unburden himself — release, context, experience...the kid's flying blind.

BAR FRIEND

And two days later he's out playing with a new puppy.

MAN

Maybe. But what happens in those two days?

BAR FRIEND

Depends on the kid. That's why dogs go live on farms — nobody wants to make a child think about things with no answers...This is a weird segue, but why the hell would you marry a lesbian?

MAN

Late bloomer...Actually, my wife's lesbianism was spilt milk.

BAR FRIEND

(after a moment)

She have big tits?

MAN

Yup.

BAR FRIEND

They're all double "A" to me...They real?

MAN

Yeah. But everything else was fake...God, but she was gorgeous...

BAR FRIEND

So much for "Truth is beauty, beauty truth," huh?

MAN

(a private toast)

Oh yeah. My wife: proof Keats didn't live long enough.

BAR FRIEND

A lesser man might grow cynical. Well, for what's it's worth, I had a similar experience — mine wasn't queer, she was crazy...

MAN nods, big sad smile.

BAR FRIEND CONT'D

...and you've got to get it out of your system if you want to feel better, one way or another. And let me tell you: anytime you can absolutely crucify someone just by telling the truth, you probably owe it to yourself to do it. You don't have to tell the world, just get it out there, and out of you...Yeah, I guess that story's worth some serious bar time.

MAN

Yeah. Maybe you're right — no right-thinking boy gets out of parochial school without wanting to arrange a crucifixion...You tell me: what kind of person suppresses her sexuality, marries against her needs, tells her husband if not for him she'd be with a woman; falls for a woman, has an affair with a man, calls to tell him, and then takes the bottle opener with her?

BAR FRIEND

Why would a dyke cheat with a guy?

MAN

(dim smile)

I suspect he asked.

BAR FRIEND

Oh...one of those. Well, when you get to the end, you'll find it doesn't matter what's true or not...

MAN

(interrupting, under his breath)

Bull shit.

BAR FRIEND

(hears him, but continues)

If it makes you feel better, that's all that counts, because you don't owe anybody anything anymore. It's always pride — you know that...The danger is stopping struggling while you're still in the water.

MAN shoots BAR FRIEND a slightly surprised look, then speaks.

MAN

I don't know, maybe she thought she was doing me a favor in some weird way, forcing me to let go.

BAR FRIEND

(after a moment)

Now that's bullshit.

MAN

I know. It's just nice to pretend sometimes.

BAR FRIEND

Well, the beauty of it is that it doesn't have to matter anymore...But, what do I know? If you want proof life is a rhetorical question, look at the people who claim to have the answers.

MAN

(ponders this for a moment)

Where the hell did that come from?

BAR FRIEND

(smiling)

What? You babble about existential crap all the time. I can't make one minor observation?

MAN

No. It's been three months of pussy jokes from you, and out of the blue you get all...

BAR FRIEND

(finishing his sentence, amused. Mock insulted.)

Coherent? Literate? Erudite? Not a drunken idiot limited to twat talk? Perhaps you're not all that great a judge of character.

MAN

Like that's a point that needs to be pounded home?

BAR FRIEND

Hmmph, maybe not. Some things, you've just got to leave to fate.

MAN

Screw that. For eight years, I gave a lesbian orgasms. Fate owes me.

BAR FRIEND downs drink, and gets up to leave.

BAR FRIEND

That may be the finest potential sleazy pick-up line I've ever heard. Work with it, and let me know how it goes. Probably do you wonders...Did I ever tell you how I came by my stick here?

MAN

No.

BAR FRIEND

One night my beloved got through a bottle of brandy, and I woke up with her thumbs in my eyes...We had some stupid argument — who enjoyed sex more or some such shit — and she always had to have the last word, one way or another...Keep all that to yourself, will you?

MAN

(after a moment, stunned)

Yeah. Sure.

BAR FRIEND

(turning and walking out)

Thought it might do you some good to hear — things always could've been worse. See you tomorrow.

MAN

Probably.

BAR FRIEND EXITS WHERE HE ENTERED. MAN sits quietly alone for a few moments. He then grabs a bar napkin and a pen, and writes something down, not noticing as an unnaturally happy-seeming STRANGER ENTERS SAME PLACE, scans otherwise empty room, approaches the bar, and speaks to MAN. MAN never really looks at STRANGER until noted, other than the occasional glance.

STRANGER

You look like you just lost your best friend.

MAN

(sagging visibly)

Go fuck yourself.

STRANGER

Wow, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to...

MAN

(somewhat apologetic)

I'm...don't worry about it.

STRANGER

Do you want to talk about it?

MAN

(pocketing napkin)

No. I want to drink about it.

STRANGER

Did you break up with your girlfriend?

MAN

(after a moment)

More or less. I said I didn't...

STRANGER

(interrupting)

I know, and I'll let you get back to your drinking, but let me ask you something. Are you a religious man?

MAN

No. Baptist school.

STRANGER

(taking BAR FRIEND'S seat)

Well...well, do you believe in the power of forgiveness?

MAN

Actually, yeah. I'd love to be able to forgive and forget.

STRANGER

So why don't you? You'll feel 100 percent better.

MAN

(after a moment)

I forgave her for eight straight years...It's like asking a guy who lost his legs in a car wreck to walk to the doctor. Sometimes the injury precludes the cure.

STRANGER

God forgives all sins.

MAN

Only when you ask. Look, I appreciate the thought, but...was that even relevant?

STRANGER

You have to let go of your anger if you want...

MAN

(interrupting, irritated)

Are you listening or just preaching?

Pause

MAN CONT'D

(calmer)

The anger is holding me, not vice versa. It's one thing to be pissed off at somebody...it's another to have your soul insulted. Some things never go away...but I wish you would now.

STRANGER

I don't mean to argue, because I can tell you're hurting, but the power to move past this is within you. You've just got to ask help from...

MAN

(interrupting)

From God? In whose eyes I was married? He should've blinked.

STRANGER

There's no use in blasphem —...

MAN

(interrupting)

Blasphemy? You just missed Blasphemy; he got up and left.

STRANGER

I don't. . .

MAN

(interrupting, venting)

Hell, I'm not even trying: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of BITCH, I will fear no evil. For thou art with me..." Beautiful...

MAN turns back to his drink.

Look — this is the part where you shake the dust off your shoes.

STRANGER

I'm not sure what you mean by that.

MAN

Paul was pragmatic — knew how to choose his audience.

STRANGER

(after a moment)

What was her name?

MAN

Doesn't matter.

STRANGER

She must have had something going for her.

MAN

(very long pause)

One year she bought me a subscription to *Playboy*. I think she was trying to distract me...Also, she could fold fitted sheets...It's tough — our relationship was almost sexual.

STRANGER

Well, at the very least, it doesn't sound like it was your fault.

MAN

Perhaps. But you can always find a fool...especially behind a woman who leads with her ti...

STRANGER

(interrupting)

Tragic things happen. And it's not like you really lost any limbs, is it? It's up to you to find a way to get up and move on.

MAN

(starting to laugh as he speaks)

It's such a beautiful word, tragedy...rolls right out of your mouth...

Pause

My life hasn't become a fucking tragedy, though...a little toss-off one act at most, and only of late...I mean, everybody's gone, yeah, but...there's more to it than that.

Pause. Still smiling.

The real birth of tragedy: some woman, somewhere, got bored, pissed off or both. The Greeks knew it: Helen, Medea, Clytemestra...

STRANGER

(smiling)

Its been a few years; you're losing me.

MAN motions to STRANGER and continues, still smiling

MAN

...Eve, Delilah, Lot's daughters, whoever the hell that was that wanted John the Baptist's head...and what was he to Hecuba, anyway — can you tell me that?

STRANGER

(after a moment)

You thought enough of her to marry her. There must have been something there.

MAN

You'd think so, wouldn't you...Our illusions fit like puzzle pieces...but the picture was by Munch. Oh well. *Res ipsa est sua ultio.*

STRANGER

What's that mean?

MAN

"The thing's its own revenge." It's from...Cicero.

STRANGER

That's nice... You know your...well, history, I guess. Or would that be literature?

MAN

Doesn't really matter. I made it up.

STRANGER

What?

MAN

I made it up. I've never read Cicero in my life.

STRANGER

Then why'd you say it?

MAN

Because I knew you'd believe it.

STRANGER

How did you know?

MAN replies slowly after a moment, turning to really look at STRANGER for the first time, realizing what he is saying as he speaks.

MAN

Because it fit the context. Because the words fit the speaker's mouth, or what you believe you know of me... Because there was no reason yet for me not to believe it. And most of all, because I wanted to believe — why in God's name would she lie.

They are silent for a moment.

STRANGER CONT'D

You know you have to forgive her. I can tell you do. You don't have a choice.

MAN

I don't see it happening.

STRANGER begins to speak, but MAN cuts him off.

MAN CONT'D

What will happen is that I eventually will stop caring in any way at all. It's forgiveness by default: all the advantages without the self righteous non sequitur of deciding to ignore something, and expecting someone else to be grateful.

STRANGER

(earnestly)

That's not how it works, and honestly it seems like you're making this harder on yourself than it has to be. Forgiveness is the only way out of where you are.

MAN

(bluntly, looking straight into his eyes and beyond. Measured.)

Right now, I hope something very heavy falls on her — like God's own cartoon anvil. Eventually, I will reach the point where I do not care if something heavy falls on her. That'll have to do.

STRANGER

There can be more to it than that.

MAN

(reaches into pocket and puts bill on bar)

Not if you don't acknowledge the metaphysical.

STRANGER

(giving up)

You're a smart guy.

MAN rises to leave, somewhat unsteadily.

MAN

No. I just read a lot. There's a difference.

LIGHTS FADE TO DARKNESS AS MAN WALKS OFFSTAGE, SAME EXIT AS BARFRIEND.

STRIKE BAR SET.

ACT V SCENE 5

"Well you lied to me
'Cause I asked you to.
Baby, can we still be friends?"

U2

LIGHTS: INTERIOR AFTERNOON. LIGHTS CAN ACKNOWLEDGE NOW ALMOST EMPTY STAGE. FULL DEN SET. MAN sits alone on sofa, looks at his watch, until there is a knock at the door. He answers. **WOMAN enters SL** with huge smile, looks around the now empty stage. She is painfully sincere throughout, like one emoting heartfelt honesty — the sense of her performing, once not shown around MAN, is now present in spades.

WOMAN

Wow, I love what you've done with the place. Mind if I look around?

MAN does not respond, and his expression does not change, but he makes no move to stop her. WOMAN begins moving in long circle, moving from SL TO SR, ostensibly from room to room, until she is back where she began. MAN follows mute behind her, looking at her with sad confusion, until the end.

WOMAN

Wow, you've got a lot of new stuff...oh, I love this...you finally got that armoire you always wanted...I hope I didn't take too much of the kitchen stuff — if you need any baking sheets or anything, you can come and get them any time...We've been doing a lot of cooking at home lately...I didn't realize till I got home with all five of them that you probably would need one or two, so come get them if you need them...

Halfway around circle, WOMAN begins to speak more and more softly, until her voice trails off completely.

She is silent, acting without voicing her words, turning to smile at him occasionally, as she continues to make her way around the stage toward the door. MAN simply stares at her, watching her performance and active emoting, with expression of defeat and sad confusion, perhaps really seeing her for the first time. She continues to mouth words until she is outside the door, and turns to face him. They are silent for a moment, until MAN reaches into his pocket and hands her a check.

WOMAN

Well, thanks...There's something you should know...

MAN

(interrupting)

I never want to see you again.

WOMAN

(unfazed, blank smile)

Okay.

MAN closes door, and resumes original position on sofa. After just a moment he looks at his watch, just as he did in opening. There is a knock at the door. He rises and opens it.

WOMAN

Wow, I love what you've done with the place. Mind if I look around?

(Although MAN'S attitude seems different, his body language must remain the same as in the initial visit.)

MAN

Why would I mind, you backstabbing bipolar gutter slut? Sure — hell, take the tour.

WOMAN does not react; she goes on just as before.

WOMAN

Wow, you've got a lot of new stuff...oh, I love this...you finally got that armoire you always wanted.

MAN begins speaking immediately as WOMAN finishes, as does WOMAN when MAN finishes — almost like one long, shared speech.

MAN

Stuff...How can you do this? How can you walk around window shopping like nothing happened, like you didn't do something wrong? Could you at least wipe that insipid goddamned smile off your face that you point at people who don't know you...

WOMAN

I hope I didn't take too much of the kitchen stuff — if you need any baking sheets or anything, you can come and get them any time...We've been doing a lot of cooking at home lately...

MAN

Like I don't know what's under that smile...We made a deal, that we would never be here...and sure enough, you're not. You're off in that place where things just happen, where it was always meant to be this way, and there was never anything that could be done... You have no idea that I am *less* because we met.

WOMAN

I didn't realize till I got home with all five of them that you probably would need one or two, so come get them if you need them ...same with the pots and pans; I wouldn't have thought we had so many.

MAN

How could you do this? I honestly don't understand. You never loved me, but you married me — you insisted that I ask; it was your idea, for the love of God.

WOMAN

Oh, you got the table that matches the big one in the dining room; they really look good together, almost like you had a designer come in...

MAN

I don't understand — I want you to tell me, I need you to explain how it is in you to do this to me...because it wasn't once. And you swore you never would.

WOMAN

I really like that look where things match from one room to the next, but not too much, you know — you want it to look casual, not planned...

MAN

I have to know why, or I'm going to go nuts, I really am. I have to understand how this is possible. I didn't do anything...I had to sit and watch.

WOMAN

I like this blue in the bedroom; that hunter green was always so dark.

MAN

(exploding)

I always wanted to paint it; you never let me — you said you liked the green, ya crazy bitch...is that it? Are you actually crazy? Or just so close that the difference only makes it worse...Could you at least tell me that I did something to hurt you? Can you just give me something to cling to, that I didn't just let you walk away without a scratch?

WOMAN

It always was too dark in there for me; you ought to like it that way.

They reach the door, and stare at each other a moment as before, until MAN mechanically reaches into his pocket and hands her the check.

WOMAN

Well, thanks...There's something you should know...

MAN

(interrupting)

I never want to see you again.

WOMAN

(unfazed, blank smile)

Okay.

MAN closes door, and resumes original position on sofa. After a moment he looks at his watch, just as he did in opening. There is a knock at the door. He rises and opens it.

WOMAN

Wow, I love what you've done with the place. Mind if I look around?

MAN

Uh...

She ignores him and follows previous path. He follows silently.

WOMAN

Wow, you've got a lot of new stuff...oh, I love this...you finally got that armoire you always wanted...I hope I didn't take too much of the kitchen stuff — if you need any baking sheets or anything, you can come and get them any time...We've been doing a lot of cooking at home lately...I didn't realize till I got home with all five of them that you probably would need one or two, so come get them if you need them ... same with the pots and pans; I wouldn't have thought we had so many. Oh, you got the table that matches the big one in the dining room; they really look good together, almost like you had a designer come in... I really like that look where things match from one room to the next, but not too much, you know — you want it to look casual, not planned... I like this blue in the bedroom; that hunter green was always so dark. It always was too dark in there for me; you ought to like it that way.

MAN

Look, sorry, but...I need you to get the hell out of here.

WOMAN

(surprised, stiffens)

You can let me see the rest of the house.

MAN

No, I really can't. I want you to go now.

She quickly makes rest of circle, stubbornly looking as she goes. They reach the door; she looks at him until he hands her the check.

WOMAN

Well, thanks... There's something you should know...

MAN

(interrupting)

I never want to see you again.

WOMAN

(unfazed, blank smile)

Okay.

MAN closes door, and LIGHTS DIM SLOWLY TO DARKNESS, as he stands at door. PAUSE FOR WOMAN TO CHANGE

LIGHTS RISE, PRECISELY AS IN ACT I SCENE 1, with MAN at center stage, DEPLETED DEN SET, both in position as in beginning, MAN with his notebook, with WOMAN asleep on sofa behind him.

You know I would
 If I could
 I would
 Let it go

U2

MAN

She followed through, thank God, and that was that.

And this, I guess, has found its empty end...

The thing I hoped to find still feels unfound,

But what I knew when I began, still stands.

And I, as has so echoed, played the fool

Tonight. Again. A farewell tour de force.

MAN CONT'D

As I...give up. There's nothing here to find.

We hear the fool's cap bells. MAN glances over, expecting cap; it does not appear.

Wow...That felt good, at least. I give. I quit.

The past's pared down; my bare essentials stay:

MAN moves to sofa, carefully sits on arm of sofa above her.

A simple quiet night that never ends.

I let her sleep — imagination can't

Restrain the memories her voice calls up,

And face to face is more than I can stand.

This one subjective place is all that's left.

I had to make a choice: acknowledge who

She was, or had become — admit defeat —

Or build this room inside my head, untouched

By sordid details like reality,

Betrayal, violence, and all the things

That made that world constrict and shrink, until

This sofa sits alone, and better off...

This place of poetry, religion, lies.

MAN is quiet for a moment, seeming to think, as though something occurs to him he does not wish to consider. MAN then stands, MOVES DSL, addressing audience, softly, so as not to disturb WOMAN. LIGHTS DIM IMMEDIATELY AND TOTALLY ON FULL DEN SET, ALLOWING WOMAN TIME TO GET OFFSTAGE AND CHANGE.

What saved my sanity was thought itself.

Examining the possibilities

Subjectively — and mainly those that hurt.

MAN MAKES HIS WAY TO CS.

Eight years of facts ignored provide a few.

I've force-fed thoughts I did not want to have...

LIGHTS: ENTIRE STAGE

LAWYER, OTHER MAN and JUDGE ENTER STAGE RIGHT; OTHER WOMAN, BAR FRIEND and STRANGER ENTER STAGE LEFT and make their way to center stage, three from each side, sitting on the empty sofa. MAN does not acknowledge their presence directly, he is only affected by what they say as they begin, one by one, to swirl about him, delivering their lines, moving from a slow to fast pace by his penultimate lines of the play.

The only thought that's left I can conceive,
Does not hold true...there was too much back then.

We were so young...there was no guile involved.

LAWYER STANDS MOVES TO MAN FROM SR, CIRCLING HIM.

ALL INITIALLY PASS BELOW MAN WHEN DELIVERING LINES, THEN ABOVE AS THEY SWIRL ABOUT HIM, BEARING RIGHT OF ONE ANOTHER.

LAWYER

There is no human relationship without guile. A mother learns to recognize her baby's cries.

MAN

(ignoring him)

We said too much, we laughed too hard and loud

For room to fit what I am thinking now.

BAR FRIEND MOVES LIKEWISE FROM OPPOSITE SIDE.

BAR FRIEND

We've laughed plenty of times. I don't see you whining about me.

OTHER MAN SPEAKS FROM SOFA, THEN JOINS OTHERS.

OTHER MAN

(quietly)

She laughed the same way she cried.

MAN

(quickly, after a moment)

The only piece that's left that might be true,
Would mesh with much... but for this I still hold...

STRANGER STANDS, MOVES TO JOIN OTHERS AROUND MAN.

STRANGER

What became of you not holding it; it holding you?

MAN

It can't be so. I'm here because I wish
It...No. It could not be she staged it all.

JUDGE STANDS, MOVES TO JOIN OTHERS AROUND MAN.

JUDGE

Why? What outside of this buffer of poor poetry you've invented
is worth holding on to?

MAN

(labored, forced to think
on his feet and not doing
well, consulting notebook
for help)

Her eyes. Like lakes that once enveloped me.
A glance was like a blanket — there was warmth,
A simple happiness we both were there...

LAWYER

(dismissive)

Jesus, son, grow up and...

*OTHER WOMAN SPEAKS QUICKLY, STANDS, AND MOVES TO JOIN OTHERS
AROUND MAN.*

OTHER WOMAN
(quietly cuts LAWYER off)

And then...?

MAN
Those ponds iced over, frigid, solid, hard;
The surface more than I could ever break.
What water there, not meant for me at all...
But for a time, I knew those waters depths.

OTHER WOMAN
(gently)
No. You didn't. There was no way you could.

LAWYER
You're going to have to come out from behind all those pretty words.

BAR FRIEND
Christ, quit being so goddamned melodramatic and just say it!

At this, MAN spins suddenly to face them.

MAN
(top of his voice)
THE BEST OF LIFE I'VE KNOWN COULD NOT BE FALSE!

MAN whirls and throws his notebook into the audience.

AFTER A MOMENT, WOMAN, DRESSED AS FIVE-YEAR-OLD IN OPENING SCENE, WALKS TO MAN FROM SOFA. He refuses to look at her for a few seconds, but eventually turns his head. She stops several feet away, shrugs and smiles as she did in opening scene, and runs back offstage in direction from which she came. OTHER WOMAN, OTHER MAN, LAWYER, JUDGE, BAR FRIEND AND STRANGER FILE OFFSTAGE, THREE IN EACH DIRECTION, FROM THE DIRECTIONS THEY ENTERED.

MAN walks over to sofa, the light reveals it empty. He looks in disbelief for a moment, then kneels and touches where her head was resting, his back to the audience. He appears to be weeping, but when he turns, he wears a bittersweet smile.

MAN CONT'D
I should have left when she said she didn't like Lyle Lovett. That's just wrong.

MAN offers the same shrug as WOMAN.

DARKNESS

CURTAIN

