

A MARRIAGE MINUET

by

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A MARRIAGE MINUTE

Character list

Douglas.....A literature professor, naive, noble, 35-60

Lily.....His wife, bright, sophisticated, 35-55

Rex.....Best selling novelist, happy philanderer, 45-60

Violet.....His long suffering wife, 35-55

Girl.....20ish, sexy, plays many parts

ACT ONE

The set is free form. Since the play is not realistic in presentation, the set need not be representational. If modules or furniture are to be used, they should be designed so that the actors can simply push them from one area to another as they continue acting. The emphasis throughout should be on simplicity.

A note on style: Action should be continuous and scene breaks are only conceptual and should not involve curtains or lights. When actors address the audience and then the characters, the transition should be rapid, a mere twist of the head. A line of dialogue denoted "to us" means that it is a thought and it may or may not be addressed directly to the audience. Generic dialogue, such as "barely suppressed irritation" or "false sympathy..." should be delivered directly to the other actor as if it were real dialogue. The emphasis in the sex scenes should be on the dialogue, not on physical presentation. At no time should the physical aspects be graphic or specific. The Girl will play several roles and she can wear something simple to denote a different character, such as a wig or an apron, but no attempt should be made to actually disguise her.

Ideally the Graphics should be on a Vaudeville style card but if more convenient, they can be projected, drop on placards, or any other way as long as the actors can appear to change them themselves by hand or gesture. The Graphic itself should have the capitalized words on the top line and the indicated scene, a store, the bedroom, etc., on the second line. If a choice must be made because of space or other consideration, use the "graphic" and drop the "scene".

AT RISE: A burst of 18th Century music. Douglas and Lily, Rex and Violet dance on in a highly stylized four-handed dance of the period that we are calling a gavotte. (It may or may not actually be one.)

Graphic: THE DANCE

Scene: Where you will.

The foursome are involved in the dance when the Girl walks past.

Enter Girl. She crosses, passing the dancers. Rex sees her, disengages from the others and dances/run/pants after the Girl. They both exit. Douglas lingers as the other dancers dance off. Douglas observes Rex's panting pursuit of the Girl and then changes the graphic.

Graphic: HIGHER EDUCATION

Scene: A junior college classroom.

DOUGLAS ZWEIG stands behind a lectern.

DOUGLAS

Well, now, I'm glad you asked that question, Mr. Cohn-Bertolli, even though you thought you were being facetious, even though you hoped you were giving your coed chums a hoot and a giggle and an illicit, cheeky twit at the stuffy professor. The difference between the literature of the 19th and early 20th centuries and the self-involved, solipsistic acts of public onanism that pass for the novels of the man you refer to as your "favorite writer"...and favorite is a word better applied to flavors of ice cream than a single selection from among the thousands of authors worthy of admiration--is that Dickens and Austen and Dreiser considered it their duty to instruct the reader in the oft delayed, tortuously arrived at but always edifyingly uplifting effects of living a moral life. They did not glorify brain-eating, heroin-abusing, sociopathic behavior as elements in a well-rounded, ethically instructive, rich, full existence. It is the presence of morality that imparts meaning and lifts literature, and life, from the merely trivial.

Douglas changes the graphic.

DOUGLAS

(continuing; to us,
of Cohn-Bertolli)
Back-stabbing favor-currying
weaseling little tweedle...

Douglas changes graphic, exits.

Graphic: THE QUEST ETERNAL

Scene: A book store.

The Girl is taking inventory of the shelves. Rex Franklin Enters. He walks past Girl, ostensibly checking the shelves for something but actually eyeing her speculatively. He passes her once, does a loop, returns and eyes her again.

REX
 (to Girl)
 Excuse me...Excuse me.

GIRL
 Yeah?

REX
 Dictionary of synonyms?

GIRL
 Aisle three.

REX
 I looked there, I couldn't find
 it. I wonder if you'd be good
 enough to show me.

Girl sighs in annoyance.

GIRL
 Barely suppressed irritation.

REX
 (Smiling)
 False sympathy for the under paid
 and under appreciated.

Girl leads him elsewhere. (A large circle ending at same
 bookshelf will do.) He eyes her appreciatively as they go.

REX
 (continuing; to us)
 I infatuate so easily. It's a
 curse. My heart is a hostage to
 beauty.

REX
 (continuing; to Girl)
 Ingratiating chit-chat.

GIRL
 Total lack of interest.

REX
 (to us)
 When the light catches the plane
 of the cheekbone at just the right
 angle. A turn of the neck. A smile
 of any kind, shy, incandescent,
 polite, embarrassed...

Girl offers cheekbone, turn of the neck, smile, all just
 before he mentions them and without seemingly paying any
 attention to him.

Girl reaches for the product on the shelf.

REX
(continuing; to us)
A flexing of the calf
muscle...that tender spot behind
the knee...so vulnerable.

GIRL
It should be right here.

REX
(to us)
I hid it...A face on a billboard,
anything. I mooned for months over
a drawing of a woman on a can of
pinto beans.

GIRL
I'll look in the back.

Girl exits.

REX
I'll look forward to your return.
(to us)
Once infatuated it drives me
insane, because what if that's
really HER? What if that's the
woman who will delight my days and
enchant my nights and do things to
my life that will be transcendent
and profound...Never sure what
exactly...I have such pangs of
loss that I don't have her--until
I can discover something, anything
wrong with her. If I find a woman
in all things perfect yet her hips
are too wide does it not follow
that somewhere out there is a
woman in all things perfect whose
hips are just precisely wide
enough to effect my fulfillment?
Virtually any flaw will do.

Girl enters, carrying book.

GIRL
Is this what you wanted?

Rex pretends to look for glasses.

REX
I forgot my reading glasses. Could
you tell me what this word is?

Rex opens the book at random and points to a word while holding book down and far enough away that the Girl is forced to bend over to read it. Rex studies her at close range while pretending to read the page.

REX
(continuing; to us)
No warts, shell-like ears...I'm
lost.

GIRL
(citing the word)
"Annoyance--nuisance, pest,
bother."

REX
I'm glad they keep the old
favorites. Thank you so much, it's
so good of you to help me. You're
as efficient as you are beautiful.

He smiles.

GIRL
(to Rex)
Pretending pleasure at the
compliment while ignoring the
implications.

Girl gives him a big, phony smile.

GIRL
(continuing)
(to us; of Rex)
Too old, too smarmy, too obvious.

Girl exits.

REX
(to us)
She shows too much gum when she
smiles. What a relief.

He shrugs, dismissing her, and puts the book back on the shelf. Rex changes graphic and exits.

GRAPHIC: DOMESTIC BLISS

SCENE: Chez Zweig.

Douglas is still steaming about Cohn-Bertolli.

DOUGLAS
 (to himself)
 Back-stabbing favor-currying
 weaseling little tweedle...
 Insolent, zit-pocked, pustulant,
 teen-aged literary poseur...
 (to us)
 Snarling, he enters his cave.

A blast of contemporary music.

DOUGLAS
 (continuing; yelling
 off)
 Turn it down, Howard...Howard!
 ...Howard!!

The music abates.

DOUGLAS
 (continuing)
 I said turn it down...Because it's
 loud and moronic, that's
 why...Bach, that's who's so
 hot...Bach does not sound like a
 metronome!
 (to us)
 Sacrilegious ungrateful little
 whelp...Snarling, he enters his
 cave.
 (to himself)
 Notes for the novel. Chapter
 three. Snarling, he entered his
 office
 (seeking the mot
 juste)
 ...to go to work...to start
 work...to begin work...to work...
 Like a modern day Grendel, his
 office littered with the bones of
 dismembered students, the man
 snarled and set to work...
 commenced working...began to
 labor...
 (to us)
 This is the writer in his cave,
 the slow sifter of words agonizing
 over a vacuum, inspiring life onto
 a blank page and quickening the
 dead ciphers of the alphabet with
 the febrile breath of imagination.
 Like a sorcerer incanting charms,
 like an alchemist with his vials
 and alembics...

Enter Lily.

LILY
Douglas?

DOUGLAS
I'm working.

LILY
Were you talking to yourself again?

DOUGLAS
It's called musing.

LILY
How do I look?

DOUGLAS
Beautiful, as always.

LILY
Do you think I've gained weight?

DOUGLAS
(to us)
Trick question. Only one answer.

LILY
(to us)
Taking much too long.

DOUGLAS
No.

LILY
Maybe I need to do more sit-ups.

DOUGLAS
You do sit ups?

LILY
Every night, you know that. And
leg lifts.

DOUGLAS
I've never noticed.

LILY
What did you think I've been doing
flat on my back with my legs in
the air?

DOUGLAS
I assumed it was a spiritual
practice. Didn't want to pry.

LILY

You're in your hateful mood,
aren't you? What happened today?

DOUGLAS

Cohn-Bertolli, the snotty little
hyphenate.

LILY

I thought you told me he was smart.

DOUGLAS

Smart as iodine on an open wound.

LILY

(to us)

Whatever happened to iodine?

DOUGLAS

But no respect for his betters. He
took it upon himself to point out
that Hemingway is a posturing
bore--it's my job to point that
out, not his, and I take an
entire, deferential semester to do
it. Now this adenoidal lout ruins
my lesson plan in three sentences.
His idea of literary criticism is
thumbs down and a rude noise, like
a movie review...Is it too late to
take a job with you in real estate?

LILY

You're too honest for that,
sweetheart.

DOUGLAS

Why do I do this, can you tell me?
Why do I spend my days trying to
teach literature to a bunch of,
oh, let's just call them
"students", shall we, and then
come home and try to write novels?
What ails me? I am yoked to
literature like Prometheus to his
rock. A harmless youthful
enthusiasm for Kipling doggerel
and adventure stories, lost boys
kidnapped by Indians, Gunga Din
saving the day--somehow
transmogrified into a lifetime
defending Virginia Woolf.

LILY

(to us)

I love it when he speaks in paragraphs.

(to Douglas)

You know you love it.

DOUGLAS

As a leper loves his bell.

LILY

Don't forget the Franklins are coming over tonight!

DOUGLAS

The Franklins! Why not roast me on a skewer? Why are we entertaining the Franklins?

LILY

We owe them.

DOUGLAS

We can't stand them!

LILY

That has nothing to do with it. We have to repay them.

DOUGLAS

If we repay them, they'll think they owe us.

LILY

You like Rex.

DOUGLAS

I don't like Rex. I thought you liked him.

LILY

Why would I like him?

DOUGLAS

Do you mean the Franklins have wormed their way into our affections under false pretenses?

LILY

At least you have something in common, you're both literary men.

DOUGLAS

Rex Franklin is not a literary man. He is a concocter of best sellers, a boiler of pots.

LILY

His last book was number one on the NY Times list.

DOUGLAS

Despite a rather prolonged downturn the American public is not yet such an ass as to make a Rex Franklin assemblage number one on the best-seller list...it was only number seven. You have to make a decision. Do you want your work to be something you're proud of, or do you want your paperbacks displayed at the check-out counter of every supermarket, convenience store and pharmacy in this whole illiterate nation?

LILY

I don't think it would hurt an author's reputation as a serious novelist if his book sold a little...I don't mean you, personally.

DOUGLAS

My latest book did sell a little.
(to us)
Damn little. She's having her revenge for the weight exchange.
(to her)
It just never found its audience.

LILY

Who was its audience and where were they hiding?

DOUGLAS

I like to think Henry James would have enjoyed it.

LILY

Does he buy many books?

DOUGLAS

(to us)

Flushed though we are with regular sluicings of marital joy there is always a little acid remaining in the creases. I don't hold it against her. I know I'm not easy.

LILY

Artistic injustice aside for the moment, the fact is we get along fine with the Franklins even though you don't like them, and we all need friends, imperfect though they may be.

DOUGLAS

Are we back to the Franklins? I thought I was holding forth on art and literature.

LILY

You were through. At least you agree that Violet is a lovely woman.

DOUGLAS

Lovely? Meaning some feminine spiritual affinity incomprehensible to men--or actually good-looking?

LILY

Don't you think she's attractive?

DOUGLAS

I don't think I've noticed.

LILY

Oh, Douglas, we've known them for six years. Are you going to tell me you don't think she has gorgeous eyes?

DOUGLAS

Does she? What color are they?

LILY

Where do you live? How can you write and be so unobservant?

DOUGLAS

I see what interests me. What are they, blue, brown?

LILY

You're narrowing the field.

DOUGLAS

I haven't paid any attention.
She's never said more than three
words in a row to me.

LILY

We've had the longest talks!

DOUGLAS

Only when you and Rex are in the
room. If we're alone she gets this
frightened, mousy look and stares
at the floor and mutters something
about her children. I don't want
to terrorize her further so I
mumble something about Howard and
then we sit in silence until you
come back.

LILY

Maybe you intimidate her.

DOUGLAS

Me? Why?

LILY

Sometimes you act so--you know--
intelligent.

DOUGLAS

Good God, do I? How embarrassing
for you.

LILY

I know you don't mean it. She
likes you.

DOUGLAS

What makes you think that?

LILY

A woman can always tell.

DOUGLAS

Then why doesn't she talk to me?

LILY

Maybe because you always choose a
topic. People don't want to
discuss anything, they just want
to talk. You can be so dense,
sometimes.

She kisses him, chastely. He puts a hand on her hip. They freeze for a moment in this semi-embrace.

DOUGLAS
(to us)
Sex?

LILY
(to us)
Sex?

They hold the pose, contemplating the possibility, then break apart.

DOUGLAS
(covering)
I had to tell Howard about his music again.

LILY
You certainly know when he's in the house.

Lily walks away from him.

DOUGLAS
(to us)
...She wasn't fooled.

LILY
(to us)
It's been so long. Even a casual touch is an embarrassment. Actual sex would seem--impolite...I have to lose weight.

Lily exits.

DOUGLAS
(to us)
What has happened to my libido? I love her, she is my support, my comfort, my happiness, my solace, my wife. I adore every line and wrinkle in her face and I'm responsible for most of them. My lady wife. I have no greater treasure...why don't I want to sleep with her?

Douglas changes the graphic. Douglas exits.

Graphic: FRIENDS

Scene: The same.

Enter Rex Franklin, his wife Violet, and Lily.

REX
Wonderful meal, Lily. General
expressions of satiety. Heaps of
fulsome praise for the feast.

LILY
Demurrers, pretense of modesty.

REX
Egregious encomiums for under-
cooked fish and over-cooked string
beans.

LILY
(to us)
It seemed to go over rather well.
(to him)
I'm so glad you liked it.

REX
Lily, you are as masterful in the
kitchen as you are beautiful in
the...bath. Bathroom.
(to us)
Christ!

LILY
Pardon me?

VIOLET
(to us)
Oaf.

REX
...as you are lovely in the living
room. Pretty in the parlor.
Stunning on the street.

LILY
Does he go on like this all the
time, Violet?

VIOLET
(sourly)
All the time.
(to us)
But not to me...If he talks about
himself any more tonight, I may
scream.

Enter Douglas.

DOUGLAS

So, Rex, working on anything new?

REX

Well, I have the seven book contract, you know. Very lucrative, of course, but a real ball and chain. Still four more to go but the last one did so well we're going to renegotiate.

VIOLET

(to us; screaming)
Arrrrrhhhhhhhhhh!!

REX

It's currently number three in the Times.

Douglas holds up seven fingers and mouths "Seven!"

LILY

Is the next one going to be about Nazis, too?

DOUGLAS

You write about them so often one suspects a secret fondness for the Third Reich.

REX

Oh, those naughty Nazis. But you got to love the uniforms. And what other group can you malign with impunity these days?...Of course I like to think the popularity of my books is due to the fact that I write about real people. Relationships, isn't that what life is really all about?

VIOLET

(to us; like a dog)
Howwwuuuuuhhh!

REX

But there's a secret to a really popular book beyond that. Do you know what it is?

DOUGLAS

Very close similarity to ever other really popular book?

REX

It's the first sentence. You've got the have a really great first sentence.

DOUGLAS

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..."

REX

Yeah, what's the rest of that?

DOUGLAS

I don't remember.

REX

That's my point. Now try this. "Sgt. Heinrich of the Waffen SS cocked his Luger and stuck it in the suspect's mouth." Now that's a great first sentence, if I do say so myself. Grabs you by the gonads, doesn't it?

LILY

That's how I experienced it.

REX

Do you know what makes that sentence work?

VIOLET

(barks)

Arf, arf, arf!

REX

It's the word "Waffen". It's attention to the significant detail, that's what writing is all about.

DOUGLAS

Do you happen to know a literary critic named Cohn-Bertolli?

REX

Now your last book...what was it called?

DOUGLAS

"Scapegrace."

REX

(to us)

What the hell is that?

VIOLET

(to us)

A rogue or scoundrel. I had to look it up.

REX

Catchy.

DOUGLAS

I wanted to title it "Stephen King's Latest Hit" but the publisher wouldn't let me.

REX

How did it do? Pretty well?

DOUGLAS

(to us)

Like all my books, it was published as a secret document.

(to him)

Oh, you know...

LILY

It sold very well. We were very pleased.

DOUGLAS

(to us)

I love her.

REX

Delighted to hear it.

DOUGLAS

It sold well into the three figures.

REX

(laughs)

Ha ha ha!

(to us)

Including remainders.

(to them)

What's the new one about?

DOUGLAS

The difficulty of living a moral life in a society without real values or morals.

REX

Your books are always about that.
You're kind of a scold, aren't
you, Dougie? Although I must say
I admire your...

LILY

Who would like an after dinner
drink?

DOUGLAS

(to us)
For pity's sake, don't keep them
here any longer!

REX

Splendid idea. I'll help you.

DOUGLAS

(to us)
And don't leave me alone with her!

Lily exits, followed by Rex. Douglas and Violet are left
alone. They look at each other very quickly. Violet
immediately looks at the floor.

DOUGLAS

(continuing; to us)
I'd sooner have a weight attached
to my scrotum.
(to Violet)
So, how are the kids?

VIOLET

(to us)
He always wants to talk about our
children. Being a good father is
a very appealing quality in a man.
(to Douglas)
I loved your last book.

DOUGLAS

(pause; to us)
Hark!
(to her)
Really? I didn't know you'd even
read it.

VIOLET

I've read all your books. Several
times. I love them. I think you're
the best unrecognized serious
novelist in the country.

DOUGLAS

(to us)

Except for the "unrecognized"
bit...

VIOLET

You treat morality as if it is a
vital part of our lives, you're
not afraid of big ideas, your
style is both lambent and
explosive...

DOUGLAS

(to us)

More more!...just to clarify.

(to her)

I'm very glad you think so.

VIOLET

Your characters are real human
beings with elaborate thought
processes and complicated but
honest emotional responses...No
wonder you don't sell well.

DOUGLAS

(to us)

Right now I'll forgive her
anything.

VIOLET

I think you're great.

DOUGLAS

(to us)

Her eyes are blue.

(to her)

Thank you, Violet. How nice.

VIOLET

I mean it. I think you're
absolutely wonderful.

DOUGLAS

(to us)

This woman is underrated.

VIOLET

(to us)

He has always been very kind to
me. The older you get the more you
appreciate kindness.

Lily and Rex enter. Lily changes the graphic.

Graphic: THE "LONNNGGG GOODBYE."

Scene: The same.

All four are trying with little success to hide expressions of boredom.

VIOLET
(continuing)
Lily, that was such a delicious
desert.

REX
(agreeing)
Oh!

DOUGLAS
Um!

VIOLET
You must give me the recipe.
(to us)
She makes it every time.

Pause, pause, pause. No one has anything to say.

REX
Encroaching deer population...
Lyme disease...Nile virus...Plague.

LILY
Expressions of concerned agreement.

DOUGLAS
Ditto.

VIOLET
(to us)
If I hold my breath long enough he
will have a heart attack and die.
Starting now.

Violet holds her breath. Pause, pause, pause.

LILY
Our President is a half wit.

REX
You're too generous by a quarter.

DOUGLAS
(to us; despairingly)
They've eaten a free meal, it's
nine o'clock, why won't they go?

Pause, pause, pause.

LILY
(to us)
I overcooked the green beans.

REX
(To us)
I think I could have Lily. I think she's available.

DOUGLAS
(to us)
Chapter three. Baring his teeth in a Waffen snarl, the writer entered his blood soaked cave...

Violet is struggling with her breath holding.

LILY
(to us)
Tedium.

REX
(to us)
Boredom.

DOUGLAS
(to us)
They'll never leave!

Violet is all but clawing the furniture in an effort to hold onto her breath.

LILY
Violet, are you all right?

VIOLET
(gasping)
Fine.

REX
She does that quite a bit these days. Just stops talking for the longest time. People will think you're crazy, Violet.

DOUGLAS
She seems to me a woman of very sound judgment, actually.

VIOLET
(to us)
If I do five hundred Kegel exercises, starting now.

(N.B. Violet's Kegel exercises should actually lift her off her seat in a way that the audience can see it.)

LILY
Concern over college admissions.

REX
Sympathy.

VIOLET
(While kegeling)
Encouragement.

LILY
Discouragement about SAT scores.

VIOLET
Sympathy.

REX
Encouragement.

LILY
But he's really very smart.

VIOLET
(Still kegeling)
Supportive tales of other friends'
stupid children.

DOUGLAS
(to us)
Upon entering his cave, the
snarling writer put the Luger in
his own mouth...

REX
My, look at the time.

No one looks at the time, but all quickly agree.

DOUGLAS
As late as that?!

LILY
The time just flew.

REX
Have to get up in the morning
because of some lame excuse.

LILY
Gratitude and understanding.

DOUGLAS
Sympathy, encouragement.

VIOLET
(to us)
Fifty seven, fifty eight...

All rise. Rex and Violet approach the exit, turn to say goodbye, and all four suddenly gush and fawn with an enthusiasm they haven't shown all night. Tedium and discomfort are swept away with relief that the evening is over and replaced by immense conviviality that is almost sincere. They speak simultaneously in a headlong burst.

VIOLET
It was so nice of you to have us over. It has been too long, we must do this again soon, you have to give me that recipe, I mean it, and I just love what you've done with the living room, let's get together, we could go to exercise class....

LILY
We're so glad you could come, it's been too long, we must do it again soon, oh, it's very simple really, just cream and eggs and sugar and gelatin and, exercise sounds wonderful I've gained some weight I know it...

REX
(simultaneously; to Douglas)
So this guy and this girl go horseback riding and they come to the woods and get off the horses and they're lying on a blanket... Rex's voice rises over the others.

REX
and the male horse mounts the female horse and starts going at it, ka-thoom, ka-thoom, ka-thoom...

The women stop and regard Rex who is demonstrating a piston motion to go along with the sound effects.

VIOLET
(to us)
I should kick him.

REX
...and the guy looks at the girl and says "now that's what I want to do." And the girl says, "go ahead, it's your horse."

DOUGLAS
Embarrassed laughter

LILY
Ditto.

REX
Joy unconfined!

Violet draws one foot back as if to administer a kick.

REX
(continuing)
You're standing funny, Violet.
What's that about?

Violet adjusts her stance so it seems to be something other than preparation for a kick.

VIOLET
Cramp.

REX
So, listen, let's get together
again real soon.

ALL
Yes, oh yes, yes, yes, yes, yes,
YES!

Rex and Douglas shake hands, the women embrace. Then Violet embraces Douglas, shyly. Rex engulfs Lily in a hug.

REX
I can't let go. What is this? Her
attraction is too powerful.
Release me, Lily, release me.

VIOLET
Let her go, Rex. You're
embarrassing everyone.

REX
It's no use, I'm stuck on her.

VIOLET
(to Douglas)
Get the hose.
(to Lily)
Don't worry, Lily, it never lasts.

REX
Guess you'll just have to let me
keep her, Dougie.

Rex walks around, holding onto Lily as if they're stuck.

VIOLET
(sternly)

Rex!

Violet gives his ear a violent twist.

REX
Ow! What's that about?

But he releases Lily. Violet exits.

REX
(continuing; to Doug)
All in jest.
(to Lily,
confidentially)
Wink, wink.

Rex changes the graphic and finally exits.

Graphic: THE POSTMORTEM

Scene: The bedroom

DOUGLAS
A night without end!

LILY
I think we're the only normal
couple we know. Is that possible?

DOUGLAS
If by normal you mean one in a
thousand, you're absolutely right.

LILY
We are lucky, aren't we?

DOUGLAS
(to us)
This sense of us against our
friends may be the best part of
marriage...safely cocooned in our
mutual embrace we lie just a
comfortable inch or two the wrong
side of smug. You can build a
great wall without mortar, the
Incas did, but how securely
conspiracy serves as cement.
(to her)
What was going on with you and Rex?

LILY

He was only flirting.

DOUGLAS

I wonder why he hasn't been shot.

LILY

Because you can't take him seriously. He's like a boisterous St. Bernard puppy. That's not the kind of flirting to worry about.

DOUGLAS

Short of looting and pillage, what else could he do?

LILY

It's not what you do, it's the attitude. A woman can tell when a man is flirting seriously just by the look in his eye.

DOUGLAS

I can't.

LILY

You are so naive about that kind of thing. You're probably being flirted with all the time and don't even notice.

DOUGLAS

I wouldn't know what to look for.

LILY

I know, bless your heart. It's nothing to worry about, it's just a little game some people play to make themselves feel attractive.

DOUGLAS

I don't like the idea of someone playing games with my wife for any reason.

LILY

Oh, don't be so disapproving. You just don't understand it because you're never tempted to do it but you get no credit for that, it's like praising a eunuch for chastity.

DOUGLAS
 (to us)
 Neutered for a simile.

LILY
 Flirtation is just a harmless
 little gavotte, done in seconds
 with a smile and an innuendo. No
 one is hurt by it. No one expects
 to be taken too seriously. Look,
 level one. Serious eye contact.

She looks at him intensely.

LILY
 (continuing)
 Level two.

She touches his arm.

LILY
 (continuing)
 Note the touch..."Oh, could you
 help me lick this stamp? I can
 never seem to do it right..."...
 Still retractable if he doesn't
 respond...Level three. "Oh, you
 have an eyelash."

Lily touches his face to remove the eyelash.

LILY
 (continuing)
 Of course if he doesn't respond to
 level one and two, you don't go to
 level three. Both of you have to
 be playing the game.

DOUGLAS
 Level four?

LILY
 I don't know, I've never gone past
 three.

DOUGLAS
 So, how do men flirt?

LILY
 Men get awkward, do something
 stupid, show off. They're not real
 subtle.

DOUGLAS
 Anything else?

LILY

They put aside their self-absorption for a moment and actually pay attention to you.

DOUGLAS

That's it?

LILY

It comes as a shock to know we're being listened to. We notice. But if they really want to get to us, they make us laugh.

DOUGLAS

Ka-thoom, ka-thoom. Go ahead, it's your horse.

LILY

He just makes himself laugh... Flirting is mostly meaningless. But I'm glad you care...Do you really think someone could still be attracted to me?

DOUGLAS

I'm still attracted to you.

LILY

I mean a man.

DOUGLAS

Husband as castrato.

LILY

You know what I mean.

DOUGLAS

You mean could another man look at the external package of natural beauty and cosmetic enhancement, the flawless features, the taut skin, the still sagless parts, could he inhale the heady mix of floral essence and musk of civet cat with which you mask your own, more beguiling odors, could he hear the gentle bell-like tones of your tinkling laughter, watch the glitter of your teeth, the flash of your almond eyes, could he take in all of this and still not be attracted to you? Is that what you mean?

LILY
Precisely.

DOUGLAS
Only if he were made of stone.

LILY
You're a sweet man, Douglas.

DOUGLAS
(to us)
I may know nothing about the
gavotte of flirtation, but I do
understand the cakewalk of
marriage. Whoever said "honesty is
the best policy" must have been a
bachelor.

Lily gives him a kiss of gratitude. They freeze.

LILY
(to us)
Sex?

DOUGLAS
(to us)
Sex?

They nuzzle a bit.

LILY
(to us)
Rex is not without charm in his
stag-in-rut sort of way.

DOUGLAS
(to us)
When Violet said I was absolutely
wonderful, did she mean just as a
writer?

LILY
(to us)
Sex?

DOUGLAS
(to us)
Sex?

BOTH
(pause)
Yes.

They embrace and make love in a stylized way. Like bad sidewalk-mimes in slow motion, they merely suggest touching each other, etc. Alternatively, the actors can remain still and the changes can be indicated by lighting. In either case, specific and graphic gestures should not be used.

LILY

(to us)

It's been so long. A little tentative to begin with.

DOUGLAS

(to us)

One has permission, still, no wish to take undue license.

LILY

(to us)

Ah. That feels familiar.

DOUGLAS

(to us)

It comes back to me now. A certain ritualized behavior. A well practiced protocol.

LILY

(to us)

More like baking than cooking. A specific amount here, a precise amount there.

DOUGLAS

(to us)

Like opening a safe. Twist a knob, press a button, insert key in lock..."Absolutely wonderful?" What did Violet mean exactly?

LILY

(to us)

Rex's boisterous puppy dog act has an appeal in its overzealous canine way.

DOUGLAS

(to us)

Listening for the clicks as the tumblers fall into place.

LILY

(to us)

Nothing wrong with vanilla.

DOUGLAS
 Patience... Do unto others as you
 would have them do unto you.

LILY
 Gone to all this trouble, might as
 well...

DOUGLAS
 (to us)
 And so...

LILY
 It's so-oh-oh-OH! eeeeeasy when you
 trust him.

The miming ends.

DOUGLAS
 (to us)
 Success. Rush of masculine pride.
 Virility reconfirmed...Felt good,
 too.

(to Lily)
 Exclamations of delight. Mutual
 congratulations on our carnal
 excellence. Vow of eternal love.
 Promise of more frequent sexual
 relations in the future.

LILY
 Ditto.

DOUGLAS
 (to us)
 I really mean it...Every time.

LILY
 (to us)
 I know he means well.

BOTH
 (to us)
 This is love.

DOUGLAS
 (to us)
 Or is it just marriage?

Rex enters, changes graphic. Douglas and Lily exit.

Graphic: THE RAKE'S PROGRESS

Scene: A book store.

Enter the Girl, wearing glasses, book in hand, perusing bookshelves. She is a customer this time, not the employee. Rex does a reconnoiter, passing her, doing a loop and returning.

REX
(to us)
When I can't find anything wrong with her, it drives me mad with longing. All of me, All of me demands that I have her or lose my last chance for salvation. And yet I require so little disillusionment to calm my heart; gum chewing, nail-biting, fake nails, nose piercing, tattoos, bad breath, bad attitude.

Girl reaches above her for a book.

REX
(continuing)
...and so little to excite it. A well-muscled bicep and I'm weak in the knees. What do I imagine that bicep ever doing with, to, or for me? I don't know, I can't think of anything, perverse or innocent, and yet, right now, I'd risk anything for it.
(to Girl)
This is a great book.

Girl looks at it doubtfully, then recognizes his picture.

GIRL
That's your picture!

REX
You have me.

GIRL
Instant, generic attraction to celebrity.

REX
Yes, I know.

GIRL
Coupled with a particular bent towards literary figures, the result of a sickly, bed-ridden childhood. I can't believe it's really you.

REX
In the flesh.

GIRL
What a coincidence!

REX
Imagine.

GIRL
Would you, I mean, could you
autograph it for me?

She removes her glasses.

REX
(to us)
Signs...

GIRL
To Cindi, with an i.

She primps with her hair.

REX
(to us)
...and signifiers.

He autographs. She reads it, touches his arm.

GIRL
Oh, that's so sweet.

REX
(to her)
Pretty, pretty, pretty, pretty,
pretty, pretty, pretty.
(to us)
They like that.

GIRL
No, really...

REX
Lovely, fair/beyond compare/full
of beauty/you're a cutie.
(to us)
They can be plain as a post and
still believe it.
(to Girl)
Some flatulent book talk as a
reminder of status.

GIRL

Not fooled for a second but
willing to make an exception to
good judgment given the attraction
to fame and power.

REX

Good enough for me.

Enter Douglas and Lily. They see Rex, watch him work his
magic. He does not see them. Rex exits, his arm around Girl.

Douglas and Lily watch them go.

LILY

It certainly does look like it.

DOUGLAS

The effrontery of the man!

LILY

Do people still have effrontery?

DOUGLAS

Aren't you shocked?

LILY

Not really.

DOUGLAS

How many mistresses does he need
before you get offended?

LILY

I don't need to get offended,
darling. You do that for both of
us. I love that about you.

DOUGLAS

We should tell Violet.

LILY

Absolutely not.

DOUGLAS

How can you be so blase?

LILY

In the first place, it's none of
our business. In the second, she
probably wouldn't appreciate it.

DOUGLAS

Wouldn't you want to know?

LILY

Douglas, nobody wants to know. If you don't know, you don't have to do anything, you don't have to make any decisions. This is a time for blissful ignorance. Besides, what makes you think she doesn't know already?

DOUGLAS

She knows he's having an affair?

LILY

Probably. Women usually do.

DOUGLAS

Why does she put up with it?

LILY

He's rich, he's famous, which means she is too, sort of. He doesn't abuse her, he's the father of her children, they have a life she's used to, she's no longer twenty-three, she has obviously developed a high tolerance for Rex if she can put up with him at all-- and maybe his affairs take pressure off of her...There are at least as many reasons to put up with him as to toss him out.

DOUGLAS

How can she take him into her bed knowing he's been with another woman?

LILY

Oh, they haven't been sleeping together for several years.

DOUGLAS

How do you know that?

LILY

Violet told me. Frankly, I think she's a bit relieved. Rex is apparently not the world's greatest lover.

DOUGLAS

Just the most active.

LILY

And his tastes are not quite as straightforward as you might think.

DOUGLAS

The things one woman will confide to another. A husband stands naked before the world of wives. Do you tell her personal things about me?

LILY

No!

(to us)

Of course. Intimacy is the currency of women's conversation.

DOUGLAS

The idea of discussing your sex life as if it were the President's...What does he do?

LILY

Do I have your interest?

She starts off, he follows.

DOUGLAS

Come on, Lily, don't leave me hanging, what does he do?

Douglas changes the graphic, they exit.

Graphic: CONQUEST

Scene: The Girl's bedroom

Enter Rex and Girl.

REX

(to us)

This one is not my heart's ease. Just an opportunity.

GIRL

My roommate, husband, mother, child won't be home for a long time.

REX

Oh, baby, baby, baby...

They assume an embrace of sorts. The sex in this sequence is also mimed, but in a less formalized, more improvisational way.

GIRL
 (to us)
 What am I doing?

REX
 Oh, baby, baby, baby...

Rex puts his hand over her breast in an exaggerated way, his hand actually at least a foot away from contact.

GIRL
 (to us)
 Why am I doing this?

REX
 Oh, baby, baby, baby...

Rex puts his other hand on her ass, in the same elaborate way.

GIRL
 (to us)
 What is he doing?

REX
 (to us)
 The first time is never any good.
 They do so many things wrong.
 (to Girl)
 Oh, baby, baby, baby...

REX
 (continuing; to us)
 Too much tongue there, too much
 movement there, oh, way too hard
 there...

GIRL
 (to us)
 Ouch, slow down, not there, not
 that, not now, not that way...

REX
 Oh, baby, baby, baby!

GIRL
 (to us)
 He needs me so much. It would be
 churlish to refuse.
 (to Rex)
 Oh, you great big man!

REX

(to us)

I love it when they call out, even if it's not my name. A woman called me Myrtle once, turned out it was her pet iguana. I didn't mind...I was confused, but I didn't mind. Oh, give me a screamer every time.

GIRL

(to us)

Will this never end?

(to Rex)

Oh, Mr. Franklin!

REX

(to us)

Okay, doing the multiplication tables now...State Capitals... Counting backwards from 100... Sgt. Heinrich of the Waffen SS stuck the Luger in the suspect's mouth...Come on, Secretariat!!

GIRL

Whee!!

His head droops, the embrace ends. She straightens her clothes.

REX

(to us)

Instant, overwhelming distaste for any further involvement. Flee with leave-your-leg-in-the-trap desperation.

(to Girl)

Wonderful, great, good for you?, got to go, call you soon.

GIRL

(to us)

Well, what can you expect from a trophy fuck? I can't wait to tell the girls.

Girl exits.

Graphic: ELEMENTARY, MY DEAR WATSON

REX

I regret the choice of woman, but not the accomplishment.

(more)

REX (cont'd)

Afterwards, alone, I revel in the sheer roguery of it. What a charming rascal I must be, smoking behind the corn crib, fooling the teacher, cheating the IRS. Don Juan is a villain only at the opera. Lonely nights, empty times, cruel reviews--I can comfort myself with the knowledge of how successfully bad I have been. I forget the women but remember the conquest, the score, the number. It's one more on the life list. I philander for the arithmetic.

Rex changes the graphic and Violet enters.

REX

(continuing)

Hideeho, and so to house and no one the wiser.

Scene: Bedroom

VIOLET

Where have you been today?

REX

Oh, facile lie, barely adequate excuse.

(to us)

No tell-tale matchbook in the pocket, no alien hairs on my jacket. Scrubbed and polished. Home free.

VIOLET

Complacent acceptance of a lame story.

REX

(to us)

Know your enemy.

Rex exits.

VIOLET

(to us)

He's at it again. Lingering smell of foreign soap, hair still damp, wearing his underwear inside out. She is clearly five foot three, left-handed, a 34 B.

Violet crosses to graphic, changes it.

Graphic: A LITTLE KNOWLEDGE IS A DANGEROUS THING

Scene: Coffee shop.

Violet sits at a table.

Douglas enters. Violet sees him, he does not see her at first. Violet studies him for a long time.

VIOLET
 (continuing; to us)
 Why not?
 (to him)
 Doug? Doug?

Douglas sees her, crosses to her.

DOUGLAS
 Well, what a happy coincidence and other general niceties.

VIOLET
 Mild expressions of pleasure.
 Would you like to join me?

DOUGLAS
 (to us)
 No. Potential awkwardness, nothing to say, wide-ranging social ineptitude.
 (to her)
 Well, actually...

VIOLET
 I've been thinking about our last conversation.

DOUGLAS
 Sure.

He sits quickly.

DOUGLAS
 (continuing; to us)
 Waiting to be admired.

VIOLET
 I was just thinking how presumptuous it was of me to tell you about your own books. I'm only a high school teacher.

DOUGLAS

Not at all.

VIOLET

You know how good they are without my telling you, don't you?

She fixes him with her gaze.

DOUGLAS

God, no. I have such a list of possibilities in my mind. They're great, they're pretentious, they're awful, they're mediocre. Did you know that "mediocre" comes from the Latin meaning "halfway up the mountain?" I have this vision of mediocre me with a pen in my hand, stuck forever on some precarious ledge halfway up a slope that is hopelessly beyond my ability to climb.

VIOLET

You're a very serious man, aren't you?

DOUGLAS

Yes, I guess I am. Kind of boring, isn't it?

VIOLET

I like it. I can't bear to think that the whole world doesn't tell you all the time how good your work is.

DOUGLAS

The whole world and I are currently not speaking.

VIOLET

(laughing too much)
You're so funny!

DOUGLAS

(to us)
She thinks I'm funny!
(to her)
Go ahead, it's your horse!

VIOLET

(laughing harder)
No, really!

She touches his arm.

DOUGLAS
(to us)
Good God! Like an electric shock,
straight to the groin!

VIOLET
I really should call Lily and make
a date for dinner. It's our turn.

DOUGLAS
(to us)
Her hand is still there!

VIOLET
You have a little something...

She reaches for his face. He flinches.

VIOLET
(continuing)
You jumped. Did I frighten you?

DOUGLAS
Did I? No, I didn't.

VIOLET
Just a little eye lash.

She reaches for his face again to remove something. He leans far back to avoid her, she pursues him and finally manages to do it.

VIOLET
(continuing)
You're not afraid of me, are you?

DOUGLAS
Of course not.
(to us)
Now, as I understand it that was
one, two and three...wasn't I
supposed to do something?
Something a man does? What was
it?...

VIOLET
I'll call Lily about getting
together.

DOUGLAS
(gasp)
Lily!

Douglas exits.

VIOLET

(to us)

Don't I deserve something? Is it never my turn? Rex is out there like a mink in heat, marking the trees. It's a wonder he hasn't been shot in a henhouse by now. I'm a fool to put up with it without fighting back...Besides, I want Douglas, I want him. I want to know what he's like, I want to know how he thinks. I want him to want me. I want him to lie awake scheming how to be alone with me, how to get up the courage to touch me. All that noble posturing--I want it done in my bed. I want the furtive thrills of meeting on the sly, I want the sweet longings of deprivation. I want him to desire me with every aching inch of his body. Aren't I entitled to some attention, some warmth, someone who thinks I matter?...And besides it's so exciting!

Violet changes the graphic and exits.

Graphic: THE PLOT THICKENS

Scene: Chez Franklin.

Rex enters, very pleased with himself.

REX

(to us;)

Heaven help me, I just screwed the maid! Is there no end to my depravity? What a rogue and peasant slave am I. Well, I'm not to blame. There's something about a maid, all that tropical immigrant sexuality roiling around in an empty house, flapping the bed linens. Le droit de Seigneur and all that, I am a slave to tradition.

Girl enters, as the maid. She curtsies coyly.

GIRL

Senor.

REX

Senor, Seigneur; what's in a vowel?

GIRL

Green card, you no forget.

She exits.

REX

Green card, absolutely, as
promised.

(to us)

Oooh, what an imp I am. I marvel
at myself, led penisforth to my
destiny....Someone stop me before
I turn on the pets.

Rex changes the graphic and exits.

Graphic: SOME TEDIOUS MORALIZING. IT'S GOOD FOR YOU.

Scene: College

Douglas enters and stands behind the lectern.

DOUGLAS

Because, Mr. Cohn-Bertolli, life
is a stern moral enterprise
whether you realize it or not and
the price of folly is destruction.
It is all too easy to think of
yourself as the rogue stag,
mocking the milling herd, but the
herd will survive, the herd will
shape the history of the species.
The herd *is* the species and those
pedestrian, bovine ways that you
deride are their protection. The
lone stag will be devoured by the
lone wolf and all his lupine pals.
Without the discipline and anchor
of the middle class, the world is
like Ghana and the Balkans and the
Ivory Coast. The choice is
structure or chaos and those who
espouse destruction of the
framework on which our culture
stands are like the teenager who
mocks the work ethic of his
parents but shows up regularly for
his three free meals a day.

Douglas changes the graphic and exits.

Graphic: TAKE HEART. ALMOST INTERMISSION.

Scene: Chez Franklin

Enter Rex and Douglas.

REX

What's wrong, Dougie? Why so glum?

DOUGLAS

This is just the way my face falls when I'm thinking.

REX

You look like that all the time.

DOUGLAS

Need I say more?

REX

Has your writing got you down?
Does it feel like passing a
pumpkin?

DOUGLAS

Elegantly and accurately put.

REX

A little tip. When you're stumped,
when you don't know what to write
next, throw in a sex scene. That's
what I do.

DOUGLAS

I've noticed.

REX

Of course you have to name some of
the body parts to do it right.
Your sex scenes are a bit
abstract. "He pleased her."
Pleased her? Dougie, ka-thoom,
ka-thoom. That's what they want.

DOUGLAS

Everything isn't about sex.

REX

Sure it is. You can't look at an
ad for a toilet bowl cleaner
without seeing a sexy babe. We've
got bimbos and bimbettes and
bimbellas dancing and jiggling a
conga line through our lives.

DOUGLAS

That is not the essence of a decent life.

REX

Ah, but it is. We live in a universe of sexual signals, they're pulsing through the ether like gamma rays, you can pick them up on the fillings in your teeth.

DOUGLAS

They're not pulsing through my universe. I'm happily married.

REX

Oh, come on. Marriage is the greatest aphrodisiac there is. Two months after I got married I was lusting for every other woman I saw.

DOUGLAS

Not every man has other women on the side.

REX

They have or they want to or they will. Anyone who denies it is as sanctimonious as a U.S. Senator. Do you think our wives don't have sex on the brain, too? Listen to the conversation tonight and I'll lift my hand every time they really mean sex.

Enter Violet and Lily, talking.

LILY

So, once you've soaked the beans, you get three pounds of sausage...

VIOLET

That much sausage?

Lily indicates a length with her hands.

LILY

At least that much. You can't have too much sausage as far as I'm concerned.

Rex lifts his hand to indicate sex.

REX
Well, okay, that's too easy.
(to all)
How about those Mets?

LILY
Oh, men and their bats.

Rex lifts his hand.

VIOLET
What is it with men and balls,
anyway?

Rex lifts his hand.

REX
The New York Times Magazine.

LILY
Beginning to sag, I think.

Rex lifts his hand.

VIOLET
They're just not up to it anymore.

Rex lifts his hand.

DOUGLAS
How do you think free trade
effects the GNP?

They stare at Douglas in silence.

REX
Who wants coffee?

LILY
I'll help.

Rex and Lily exit.

VIOLET
How is Howard?

DOUGLAS
Oh, fine. How are your...children?

VIOLET
The girls are fine.

Graphic: MEANWHILE

Scene: The Kitchen

Lily and Rex enter to the other side of the stage.

REX
Can you get the cups?

LILY
(to us)
I look good in this outfit.

Lily stretches for the cups.

Douglas and Violet both study the floor for a moment.

VIOLET
Douglas. There's something I have
to say to you.

DOUGLAS
(to us)
More praise would be nice.

VIOLET
I don't know how to put it so I
guess I'll just say it. It's been
building for so long I think I'll
bust if I don't get it out.

DOUGLAS
(to us)
Burst, not bust.

VIOLET
I think I love you.

Douglas is stunned into brain silence for a moment. He stares
at us in a stupor.

Rex and Lily in kitchen.

REX
(to us)
Oh, the legs, the arms, the
breasts. A woman stretches in
front of a man at her peril.

Rex puts his hand on Lily's neck, preparatory to a kiss.

LILY
Now, Rex...

REX
I have to.

LILY
 (to us)
 Oh, well.

They have a real kiss, long and lingering. They remain locked in the kiss for the rest of the act.

Scene: The living room.

VIOLET
 Do you hate me for saying that?

DOUGLAS
 (to us)
 No.
 (to her)
 No.

VIOLET
 I was afraid you'd run from the room or give me a lecture about propriety. But since you haven't...what do you think we should do about it?

DOUGLAS
 Uhhhh....

VIOLET
 (to us)
 I love the crisp cunning of his mind...

DOUGLAS
 I, uhhhhh....

VIOLET
 (to us)
 He says what he feels and he means what he says.

DOUGLAS
 Uhhhh.

Violet reaches out and takes Douglas's hand in hers. He flinches, nearly jumps, but lets her keep his hand.

VIOLET
 I know. It's frightening, isn't it?

Douglas walks towards the graphic.

DOUGLAS
 (to us)
 Is this level four?

Graphic: INTERMISSION. SMOKING IS BAD FOR YOU.

CURTAIN

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Graphic: THE GAVOTTE

Again a strain of 18th century music. Rex and Violet enter, dancing in the elaborate, stylized fashion of that age. The dance is different from the one that opened the play, less formal, more sensual. Enter Douglas and Lily. They stop to watch the dance, curiously. Violet and Rex make gestures for them to join in. Both Douglas and Lily are tempted. Rex breaks loose from Violet and does a single in front of Lily, not unlike a bird doing a mating dance.

VIOLET

Why do men always think they're
doing it alone?

Violet beckons demurely to Douglas. Rex holds out his hand for Lily, she takes it and joins in the dance which is now for three. Douglas is alarmed that Lily has left him but he is powerless to move as the three of them dance off and change the graphic as they exit.

Graphic: FOR THOSE WHO MISSED THE POINT SO FAR

Scene: College

Douglas enters and stands behind the lectern.

DOUGLAS

No, Mr. Cohn-Bertolli, not everyone does it. Some people pay their taxes, return the extra money when a cashier makes a mistake, deposit their litter in the proper receptacle and some--yes, some--turn off their cell phones when they should. You seem to think these people are fools and dupes and schmucks, that they're missing out on the wise guy, corner cutting, leg-up advantages. Well, yes, that's the point. They miss out, they do without, they struggle to lift the impossible weight of their own expectations...but that's precisely the point. Why did Shakespeare write in sonnet form? Because it's difficult and confining and that constriction released his genius.

(more)

DOUGLAS (cont'd)

It's the deprivation, it's the sacrifice that gives value to the experience... That's actually Elizabeth Barrett Browning whose sonnet you misquote, Mr. Cohn-Bertolli, but you have the general idea...

(to us)

Iambic pentameter as an ethical determinant. An interesting notion, to be sure, but who can concentrate when there's sex on the agenda?

Douglas changes the graphic. Douglas exits.

Graphic: THE WORM

Scene: En route

Rex enters. He glances at the graphic, points to himself in disbelief and disapproval.

REX

(to us)

I'm not feeling very good. My stomach has come unmoored and is floating loose, pressing on my heart, and my vision is blurred, I keep seeing a face that isn't there, and yet I've never felt better in my life.

Scene: Beneath Lily's balcony.

REX

(continuing; to us)

What raw magic then is this? We exchanged a simple kiss. I have kissed some several score, yet never felt like this before. Was there some potion on her lips? Some perfect measure of the hips? I am transformed, I am bewitched, and all my rakish plans now switched to stratagems of true desire for Lily's drip to quench this fire. Senses swirling willy-nilly I'll yet find means to gild this Lily....Ye gods, poetry. The greatest sin of the besotted.

(more)

REX (cont'd)
And yet I swear there was
something so perfect about her
kiss, a melding of mouth to mouth,
when her lips touched mine I felt
that I was melting on the spot. I
have to Have to HAVE TO have
her...Oh, fuckeroo, I'm in love.

Lily enters

REX
(continuing)
But soft.

LILY
No, Rex.

REX
Please.

LILY
No, it's very flattering, but no.

REX
Why not?

LILY
(to us)
Persistence is very appealing.

REX
Pretty, pretty, pretty, pretty.

LILY
Thank you.
(to us)
I am no schoolgirl to be beguiled
by simple praise, however well
deserved.

REX
Pretty, pretty, pretty, pretty.

LILY
(to us)
Of course there's something about
quantity, too.
(to him)
I must go now, Rex.

REX

I'll wait for your return.
 Heedless of the wind and weather
 as long as the question's when,
 not whether.

LILY

You're being silly.
 (to us)

Certainly not what one expects
 from Sgt. Heinrich of the Waffen
 SS... It's only a harmless little
 flirtation, good for a cheap
 thrill and a giggle.

(to him)
 Good night, Rex.

Lily exits.

REX

(to us)
 That's not the same as "go away".

Rex changes graphic and exits.

GRAPHIC: DEE-FENSE

Scene: The Coffee Shop.

Douglas enters, sits. GIRL, as waitress, enters and crosses
 to him.

GIRL

Order?

DOUGLAS

Coffee.

GIRL

(to us)
 He's hitting on me.

DOUGLAS

(to us)
 She seems a nice young woman.

Girl starts to exit. Violet enters, crosses to Douglas who
 does not immediately see her.

VIOLET

Well, hello.

She touches his arm. Douglas flinches.

DOUGLAS

Oh, hello.

VIOLET

I always seem to be startling you.
I'm sorry.

DOUGLAS

I have sharply honed reflexes, in
case of attack--by a saber toothed
tiger, for instance.

VIOLET

I'm in good hands then.

Douglas puts his hand in air to indicate a sexual innuendo as
Rex taught him.

DOUGLAS

Well, this is a pleasant surprise.
How are you?

Douglas offers to shake hands. She ignores it and gives him an
air kiss.

GIRL

Order?

VIOLET

Coffee.

GIRL

(to us)

Bitch.

Girl exits.

VIOLET

How are you, and other chit-chat?

DOUGLAS

Stammering, hesitant, confused
response.

VIOLET

I hoped I might hear from you.

DOUGLAS

Back and fill, buck and wing.

VIOLET

I know, it's difficult, isn't it?
I'm having trouble with it, too.

(more)

VIOLET (cont'd)
 (to us)
 But enjoying every minute.
 (to him)
 Are you sorry I told you?

DOUGLAS
 No.
 (to us)
 Heaven help me, I'm not.
 (to her)
 And I'm very flattered, Violet, I really am. Touched and flattered and I don't think I've felt so--scattered--and torn and agitated in my life. And I thank you for that.

VIOLET
 It sounds very painful.

DOUGLAS
 Well, it is, really, because you see, there's nothing to be done about it.

VIOLET
 We don't have to do anything. I'd just like to be with you, and talk.
 (to us)
 Right.

DOUGLAS
 (simultaneously; to us)
 Right.
 (to her)
 I mean, well, we're both married, though, aren't we?

VIOLET
 I understand. I've embarrassed you, and put you in an awful position. I'm so sorry. The last thing I want is for you to feel uncomfortable around me. I withdraw the remark, all right? Just forget I ever said it and we'll go back to being good friends. And we are good friends, aren't we and other face-saving nonsense?

DOUGLAS
 Violet...

VIOLET

I understand, I really do, and I admire you for it. Let's say no more about it, we'll just go on the way we were, no hard feelings. All I want is what's best for you, no matter what.

DOUGLAS

Thank you.

VIOLET

(to us)

I've cheated on my husband only twice and only once was serious. You can't really count the time with the old boyfriend at the reunion. That was unfinished business. Besides, I'd slept with him before I got married anyway, so I wasn't giving away any secrets...I think that's pretty good.

Violet changes graphic. Douglas and Violet exits.

Graphic: SEEN IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT

Scene: Bookstore

Girl enters. This is the bookstore girl from before. She wears glasses and is looking through the shelves again. Rex enters. He does not see Girl at first as he looks for the right shelf.

REX

Poetry, poetry...

(to us)

Poetry is a vile thing. Unless the author is certifiably dead, I won't even look at it. And if it doesn't rhyme, what makes it poetry? Still, there are those times...

(aloud)

Poetry, poe...Good lord!

He has spied the Girl, who does not see him. Rex bends out of sight beneath the shelf.

REX

(continuing; to us)

A former conquest! What's she doing here? I hate meeting people out of context.

He peeks over the shelf, ducks down again.

REX
 (continuing; to us)
 Friends, family, golfing
 partners...a place for everyone
 and everyone in her place.

He peeks again. The Girl is safely looking away from him. He studies her for a moment.

REX
 (continuing; to us)
 I so seldom see them in full
 light...I'm used to looking at my
 women at extremely close range so
 my vision is blurred which does
 wonders for the aesthetics--My, I
 have indiscriminating taste when
 opportunity arises.

Girl exits. Lily enters. She does not see Rex.

REX
 (continuing)
 But soft.

Lily goes directly to the shelf she wants and kneels to tend to the book.

LILY
 (to us)
 I make a weekly sweep of the local
 bookstores, tending to his latest
 novel...Two copies here last week,
 still two copies here today.
 Sometimes I'll move one somewhere
 else so that if he comes in and
 finds only one he'll think he's
 actually sold the other. Of course
 I don't know that he checks, he
 doesn't admit to it...Turn it so
 it's facing outward like they do
 with the bestsellers...Sometimes
 I'll put one on the bestseller
 table but someone always moves it
 back...I really wish they sold
 better, it would make him so
 happy. They're good books. Hard to
 read and rather boring, but
 good... I wish it didn't feel
 quite so much like taking care of
 someone's grave.

REX
Do you believe in coincidence?

LILY
No, Rex.

REX
I ache, I yearn, I burn.

LILY
No, Rex.

REX
I can't eat, I can't sleep, I'm
withering away.

LILY
Ask your wife to help you.

REX
That's cruel.

LILY
She's stuck by you, she's nursed
you, she knows you as no other
woman can. What's wrong with her?

REX
She's stuck by me, she's nursed
me, she knows me as no other woman
can.

LILY
No, Rex.

REX
You haunt my imagination, I am
obsessed by the thought of you.

LILY
No.

REX
Picture me, but for my bad back,
at your feet. I kiss the hem of
your garment.

LILY
Hold still. You have an eyelash.

She touches his face, removes the lash, blows it away.

LILY

(continuing; to us)

So I give him a little something.
It's like petting a dog that's
rooting at your crotch. There's
just no way to ignore him without
appearing to enjoy it.

(to him)

Down, Rex. I'm happily married.

Lily exits.

REX

(to us)

The key is perseverance. Keep at
them long enough and they'll think
they owe you. It's the three date
rule writ large...There is no
seamless marriage. There are
clefts and fissures in the
stoutest wall that swell and
contract with the matrimonial
weather. How small a breach is
needed to admit a billet-doux, a
whiff of excitement. A seed of
desire, wafted by a zephyr of
flattery can take root within the
crevice and crack the hardest
stone...And such practical
scheming in no way diminishes the
purity of my love.

Rex starts to go then returns to the shelf and rearranges
things around his book.

REX

(continuing; to us)

Just a little housekeeping...Look
at those beautiful embossed
swastikas on the cover. God bless
'em.

Rex exits, Violet enters, Bookstore worker Girl enters.

VIOLET

Excuse me. Do you have a book
called "The Joys of Adultery"?

GIRL

A knowing look.

VIOLET

For my...mother.

(to us)

I love self-help books although the only people they help are the author and publisher. They're like New Year's resolutions, they make you feel virtuous for upwards of a day.

Douglas enters and crosses to the same book shelf, also kneeling.

DOUGLAS

(to us)

Ah, they're displaying it differently. Great! Maybe turned a bit more this way...Book sales are highly alphabet dependent. Look at a shelf in any store and what are the books at eye level? Letters G to N. Grisham, King, Ludlum, McMurtry. Even naughty old Anais Nin. Where do you reach to skim that all important first sentence? Grisham, King, Ludlum, McMurtry. What do you reach out to buy? The same popular villains. How else to explain it? Why rise on your toes to the double A's, why bend and stoop? What chance does poor Zweig have, down there in kneeling territory in the far right hand corner? If you have a lumbar condition, you'll never see my books at all. My novels are purchased only by people who have slipped and fallen. I'm very popular with those who are immediately post-seizure. That's why there's never been a best seller from my end of the alphabet since Emile Zola.

Enter Girl as the book store customer again. She joins Douglas at the shelf, reaches for a book.

DOUGLAS

(continuing; to us)

Mailer. Pfff!

Girl puts the book back, looks lower on the shelf, lower, then lower still while Douglas holds his breath.

DOUGLAS
 (continuing; to us)
 Be still my heart.

She selects a book and stands.

DOUGLAS
 (continuing; to us)
 Zola...Ten years, five novels, and
 I've never seen anyone reading one
 of my books, buying one, using it
 as a door stop. Laboring in
 obscurity is one thing, but I toil
 away under the mountain like a
 troll...And yet, to me, it seems
 I'm mining gold...but Violet gets
 them.

Douglas changes graphic and exits.

Graphic: THE LIE THAT BINDS

Scene: Chez Zweig

Lily enters.

LILY
 (on phone)
 No, Rex...No, Rex...No,
 Rex...well, maybe...Oh, I
 couldn't...I shouldn't...
 (laughs)
 You're so funny...we'll see.

Enter Douglas.

LILY
 (continuing; phone)
 I have to go.

She hangs up hurriedly.

DOUGLAS
 (to us)
 Snarling, the writer entered his
 cave...notes for the
 novel...Spring has come. The
 amorous thinks of his carnal
 delights, the ambitious plots his
 career, the talented totes up the
 less talented who have surpassed
 him, the untalented who have
 passed judgment upon him, the
 unappreciative who ignore him, the
 unwashed who don't deserve him...

LILY
Hello, darling.

DOUGLAS
Who was on the phone?

LILY
...Oh, that was just Violet.
(to us)
In the very unlikely event that he checks the caller ID, it's the same number. It's not a practiced deception, I'm just quicker than he is. Most of us are.

DOUGLAS
Violet? What does she want?

LILY
Nothing, just saying hello.

DOUGLAS
I didn't know you two were that close.
(to us)
Was she calling me? Will she let anything slip while talking to Lily? Is there anything to let slip? I've done nothing, my conscience is clear. So why do I feel so screamingly guilty?... I will arrange a tryst, I mean a meeting, to tell her this must cease.

Douglas exits.

LILY
(to us)
Well, we're better at it than they are, we just are.

Lily exits. Douglas enters.

Graphic: A HASTY RATIONALIZATION

DOUGLAS
(to us)
Believing all I believe, feeling all that I feel, how can I go to her?...How can I not? I melt inside, I am reduced to gel, I quiver just in contemplation...Do I love her? I don't even know her!
(more)

DOUGLAS (cont'd)
 Do I want her? I want something,
 she's given me the taste for
 something. Something I didn't know
 I lacked. I don't even know what
 to call it. The vocabulary is
 foreign to me. Intelligence is
 possible only in a culture in
 which words have particular,
 agreed-upon, meanings. All else is
 point and grunt.

Douglas exits.

Graphic: ALTOGETHER NOW, "DON'T DO IT!"...UNLESS YOU THINK HE
 SHOULD.

Scene: Chez Franklin

Violet enters.

VIOLET
 (to us)
 He's coming. My womb is aflutter.

Enter Douglas.

VIOLET
 (continuing)
 Hello.

DOUGLAS
 Grunt, grunt.

VIOLET
 You're so funny.

DOUGLAS
 Is Rex here?

VIOLET
 He won't be home for a long time.

Enter Rex. He changes the graphic.

Graphic: MEANWHILE

Scene: Lily's balcony.

Lily enters. Rex sinks to one knee, extends his arms in the
 suitor's classic pose.

REX
 (howls like a wolf)
 Howoooooh!

LILY
 (to us)
 That's so sweet.

Douglas and Violet.

DOUGLAS
 Violet...a great deal of
 beautifully worded noble posturing
 in which I say this can't go on,
 we're both too good, too fine, too
 honorable to sully the institute
 of marriage and our sacred,
 atheistic vows...

VIOLET
 I understand.

Lily and Rex.

LILY
 (to us)
 You can't tease them forever, it's
 just not nice. After a certain
 length of time you have an
 obligation.
 (to Rex)
 Well...alright. Come on in. But
 just to talk.

Rex rises and goes to Lily.

REX
 (to us)
 Smugly I rise, reconfirmed in my
 charms--which in no way detracts
 from my genuine passion for
 her...well, a little..

Douglas and Violet.

DOUGLAS
 (to Violet)
 So, I guess I'd better go.

Douglas starts off.

VIOLET
 We could just talk...

DOUGLAS
 I don't think...

VIOLET
 ...about your book.

Douglas turns on his heel, rushes to Violet and takes her in his arms and kisses her, passionately.

REX

I have such pain of longing.

LILY

Well, for *mercy's* sake.

Rex and Lily embrace.

GRAPHIC: FINALLY!

Both couples step behind neck high portable screens such as those used in medical offices, or any other device suitable for hiding. They are concealed behind them except when speaking, and then they show the audience only their heads, at sometimes surprising angles, and the odd limb or two.

Douglas pops up from behind screen.

DOUGLAS

(to us)

My bowels are water. I fear I'm losing control of my sphincter. Not sexy...and yet...

He vanishes behind screen.

Rex and Lily.

REX

The usual endearments.

LILY

(to us)

He's awfully good with snaps and clasps and buttons.

They vanish.

Douglas.

DOUGLAS

(to us; horrified)

I feel graceful as a felled tree sprawled atop this woman.

He vanishes. Violet pops up.

VIOLET

Oh, sweetie, oh lover...

DOUGLAS
 (to us)
 Oohhh, don't call me that.

They vanish.

Rex and Lily.

REX
 (to Lily)
 Yum yum yum!

LILY
 You've done that. I'm ready.

They vanish.

Douglas and Violet.

VIOLET
 (to Douglas)
 Oh, Doug, oh, lambie.

DOUGLAS
 (to us)
 Or that.

They vanish.

Rex and Lily.

REX
 Yum yum!

LILY
 I'm ready, Rex.

REX
 Yum yum?

They vanish.

Douglas and Violet.

DOUGLAS
 (to us)
 I'm awkward, I'm clumsy, I can't
 seem to find things, where did she
 put it?

VIOLET
 (to us)
 What the hell is he doing?

They vanish.

Rex and Lily.

LILY
Come on, Rex.

REX
I can do that.
(to us)
Come on, Secretariat!

They vanish.

Douglas.

DOUGLAS
(to us)
Who's responsible for this design?
A man needs grips, guideposts,
directional signs.

He vanishes.

Rex.

REX
(to us)
Come on, Secretariat!

He vanishes.

Douglas.

DOUGLAS
(to us)
Lily always takes care of this
part.

He vanishes.

Violet.

VIOLET
(to us)
Where does he think he's
going?...That's not it!

She vanishes.

Rex.

REX
(to us; worried)
Come on, Secretariat!

He vanishes.

Douglas and Violet.

VIOLET
(to us)
What is the big mystery?

DOUGLAS
(to us)
Oh, there it is!

They vansish.

Rex and Lily.

REX
(to us)
Secretariat?...I am unhorsed!

LILY
(to us)
He is unmanned.

REX
(to us)
A horse, a horse!

LILY
It doesn't matter, Rex.
(to us)
And technically, it doesn't count,
either.

REX
(to us)
Secretariat?!

They vanish.

Douglas and Violet.

VIOLET
(to Douglas)
Oh, lover!

DOUGLAS
(to us)
Who cares? I'm pleasuring her now!
Come onnn, Secretariat!

VIOLET
(to us;
simultaneously)
...Come onnn, Secretariat!

Rex and Lily come out from behind the screen, Lily straightens her clothes.

REX
Never, not ever...

LILY
It really doesn't matter.
(to us)
Just like size and stamina.

REX
My desire for you was too strong,
in a funny way...

LILY
(to us)
Ho, ho.

REX
I'll do better next time...
(to us)
As if.

LILY
(to us;
simultaneously)
As if.

REX
And other bits of unfounded
optimism to cover my retreat as I
slink off...

Rex exits.

LILY
(to us)
Never up, never in.

Lily exits.

Douglas and Violet.

Douglas crosses the finish line, yells in triumph, separates from Violet and cries out in despair all in one continuous move.

DOUGLAS
(to us)
Heeeyaaahhhwowwwhat have I done!

Douglas races off and exits. Violet straightens herself and comes out from behind screen.

VIOLET

(to us)

There ought to be a rule. A man can not reach for his pants while his feet are still in the stirrups...It's not the orgasm. I can take care of that. I'd gladly do away with the whole sordid tussle in exchange for a half hour of gentle touching. Is that so much to ask?

Violet changes the graphic.

Graphic: THE AFTERMATH, OR ARITHMETIC

Scene: Chez Franklin

Rex enters, gives Violet a big, fake, kiss.

REX

(kissing noise)

Mmmmmwhaaaa!

VIOLET

(to us)

He's been cheating on me again.

REX

(to us)

She's totally oblivious. What a wonderful wifely trait.

VIOLET

What were you up to today?

REX

Nothing, really.

(to us)

Which is very close to the truth.

(to her)

How about you?

VIOLET

We got an invitation to a dinner party from the Cohns. She told me the Zweigs were invited, too.

REX

Oh, yes? How nice.

VIOLET

(to us)

I could never be in the same room with her, she could tell just by looking at me. A woman always knows.

(to him)

Do you want to go then?

REX

Up to you.

VIOLET

I don't think so.

REX

Absolutely not.

They exit. Douglas and Lily enter. They change the graphic.

Graphic: FLAMING GUILT

Scene: Chez Zweig

LILY

Hello, darling.

DOUGLAS

(to us)

She knows!!

LILY

Anything happen today?

DOUGLAS

(to us)

I am undone!

(to her)

No. You?

LILY

No.

(to us)

He hasn't a clue.

(to him)

We got an invitation to dinner at the Cohns...Rex and Violet are invited.

DOUGLAS

(to us)

Oh, god.

(to her)

Do we have to?

LILY

(to us)

It might be fun to watch Rex squirm.

(to him)

Is there any good reason to say no?

DOUGLAS

(to us)

I can't talk to her! This is awful! Dissemble to my wife? I don't know how! I tell her everything.

LILY

What's the matter, sweetheart? Aren't you feeling well?

DOUGLAS

(to us)

There is a canyon of guilt between us, my voice won't carry across it.

LILY

Is anything wrong at school? Are you having trouble with your work?...You know you'll feel better once you tell me, you always do...Well, whenever you feel like talking to me, I'll be here.

(to us)

Just because I cheated on him--well, almost cheated--doesn't mean I don't love him.

Lily exits.

DOUGLAS

(to us)

What have I done! I am wounded! I have injured myself! I have brought silence to my marriage, I have distanced my best and only friend, with my promiscuous spade...

On the word "spade", Douglas raises his hand to note the sexual undertone. He does it unconsciously.

DOUGLAS
(continuing)

What is the matter with me? Even as I bemoan the wretched loss of intimacy with my wife I revel in some kind of sexual dementia. I am obscurely proud of myself...What have I done? Whom can I tell? The only one in all the world I want to confide in is my Lily. I need comfort, I need advice--things I always got from her. I have no friends to torment with this, she is my friend, she is my counselor, whatever life I live outside my mind I live with her and through her and for her...Whom can I turn to?

Enter Rex. He changes graphic.

Graphic: A MOST IMPROBABLE CONVERSATION: FEEL FREE TO TAKE SIDES.

Scene: In confidence.

DOUGLAS
(continuing; to Rex)
So I have this friend
who...uh...met this woman...

REX
(to us)
Old Dougie Clenched-Bottom has a mistress. I don't know whether to gloat or lament. If everyone cheats the rules there are no rules...so where's my advantage?

DOUGLAS
He can't take it any more. His conscience is tearing me apart. I will not be parted from my wife even that much by a dirty little secret. I have to tell her.

REX
Whoa! Never confess.

DOUGLAS
I want my life back, I want my wife back, I want our intimacy back.

REX
Never confide, never confess.
(to us)
I must find out who she is. Once
they're put into play, they're
more accessible. Fun for one, fun
for all.

DOUGLAS
I must tell her.

REX
She doesn't want to know.

DOUGLAS
She must know anyway.

REX
Never assume.

DOUGLAS
I must have guilt written all
over--his--face.

REX
Don't flatter yourself. You're not
the center of her attention, she
is.

DOUGLAS
I am not made for duplicity.

REX
She is, she's a woman.

DOUGLAS
What I have done is wrong!

REX
All of nature tells us it's not.
Even life-long mates cheat, even
geese, even swans.

DOUGLAS
I am not an animal.

REX
We have to do it. Men are the
romantics!

DOUGLAS
It's a sin, it's against the law,
it's immoral. I can't live a lie.

REX

Sure you can, you're a man. Suck it up.

DOUGLAS

It's no good, I have to tell her.

REX

She won't thank you for it.

Douglas exits.

REX

(continuing)

It's guys like that who give us a bad name. Women never confess. They may get caught, but they never confess. Only men are troubled enough by morality to actually act on it. And yet all of morality is in favor of the women. They got in league with the priests and the sissies and made this stuff up. Lie, cheat, steal, fornicate...those are right up a man's alley. Why would we want to take those things away from ourselves? They encoded hypocrisy and named it Commandment. The women outfoxed us.

Rex changes graphic.

Graphic: EPIPHANY, OR HOW TO KEEP A GOOD MAN DOWN

Scene: Street

Enter Girl.

GIRL

Excuse me. Aren't you what's his name?

REX

Yes, I am.

GIRL

Oh, I just loved what-do-you-call-it.

REX

Most kind.

Girl touches his arm.

GIRL
The scene with the girl and the...

REX
Handsome SS Major?

Rex raises his hand.

GIRL
Where he...

REX
Was wearing only his iron cross?

GIRL
And she...

REX
Was wearing only his jack boots?

GIRL
That was so...you have a little
something on your face.

She touches his face.

REX
Thank you.

GIRL
Would you sign my boob? Book?

REX
Happy to.

He signs and moves on.

REX
(continuing; to us)
A very pleasant young woman.

GIRL
I must be getting old.

Girl exits. Rex stops as the realization hits him.

REX
(to us)
Nothing! I felt nothing! First
Lily, and now this? Could it be
that the old boy's down for the
count? Could it be he's stopped
bumping against my navel forever?
Can I be impotent?
(more)

REX (cont'd)

Oh, please, dear god...let it be true! What a relief! The beast has tugged me around like a cat on a leash since I was twelve years old. Free at last after all these years? No more meaningless trysts, no more humping lampposts, no more panting till I trip on my tongue. Oh, blessed detumescence! At long last I can turn my energies to something meaningful. Charity work, flower arranging. I've always wanted to take a whack at feeding the homeless...I will devote myself to Violet, my true and faithful wife. I have mistreated her, but now I will make all things right...and right after that, world peace.

Rex changes the graphic but stays on his side of the stage, watching Douglas and Lily.

Graphic: CONFESSION IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL

Scene: Chez Zweig

Enter Lily and Douglas.

DOUGLAS

Lily, I have something to tell you.

LILY

(to us)

Uh-oh.

DOUGLAS

I have done something...

LILY

I don't want to hear this.

REX

Don't do it!

DOUGLAS

I have to tell you, I feel so bad.

LILY

(to us)

So now you want to inflict it on me? Keep it to yourself.

DOUGLAS
My conscience is killing me.

LILY
(to us)
Fight it, fight back. You can
defeat your conscience!
(to him)
What is it, darling?

DOUGLAS
Oh, Lily, abject confession of the
awful truth. Appropriate sniveling
and promise of reform.

Rex changes the graphic.

Graphic: THE INEVITABLE QUESTION

Scene: The same

LILY
What does she have that I don't
have?

REX
Nothing!
(to us)
Really, nothing. That's what they
never understand. It isn't about
them, it's about us. They've done
nothing wrong, there's nothing
they can improve. Weight loss and
nose jobs and implants have
nothing to do with it. There is no
prevention, there is no
protection, there is no remedy,
there is no cure. And there is no
fault, no blame. Your husband
didn't stray because you were
inattentive or overweight or even
because he didn't love you. He did
it for the novelty, he did it
because of the opportunity, he did
it for the numbers.

Rex changes the graphic.

Graphic: MATTERS TAKE A SERIOUS TURN

Scene: The same.

DOUGLAS
Can you ever forgive me?

LILY

No.

DOUGLAS

What?

LILY

No. I won't forgive you.

DOUGLAS

I'll make it up to you.

LILY

You can't.

DOUGLAS

Lily, it didn't mean anything...

LILY

Ah, but Douglas, it did. With you, it did. With someone else, with someone like Rex, it would be meaningless, but not with you. It was too important to you.

(to us)

I see no inconsistency here.

(to him)

You think too much to act idly. Your principles are too important to you to throw them aside for a meaningless act.

DOUGLAS

It was one time, one time.

LILY

All the worse.

DOUGLAS

If I were promiscuous, it would have been all right?

LILY

What's one more hamburger to a fat man? But to a vegan...

(to us)

Oh, Rex, Rex, so what? I never preached fidelity. The only principle I had to overcome was a mild aversion to Rex himself.

DOUGLAS

I can't believe this.

LILY
It doesn't matter if a C student
cheats. But the honor student?

REX
(to us)
I told him. None so blind as he
who will not listen.

Graphic: THE OTHER INEVITABLE QUESTION

Scene: The same

LILY
Who is she?

DOUGLAS
Does it matter?

REX
(to us)
No.

LILY
Of course.

DOUGLAS
Violet Franklin.

REX
Violet!?

Rex changes graphic. Rex exits to find Violet.

LILY
(to us)
I am no prude, I am no moralist.
I get lost and confused in his
maze of ethics, but...

(to him)
You have embarrassed me in front
of my friends, you have flaunted
it in my face...

DOUGLAS
Lily, I didn't choose this!

LILY
Of course you chose it. No adult
is seduced. At most, they are
simply encouraged...You must go,
Douglas.

DOUGLAS
You don't mean it!

LILY
 (to us)
 Well, I do at the moment, with
 full awareness that I won't later
 on.

DOUGLAS
 Lily, please, you mean the world
 to me.

LILY
 You should have thought of that
 earlier. Go.
 (to us)
 My pride is hurt. On a business
 trip, some one night stand with a
 slut in a bar...but a married
 woman? Someone my age? It's
 insulting.

Douglas slinks off and exits.

LILY
 (continuing; to us)
 I will make him pay. I may even
 put him through the sham of
 marriage counseling which seems to
 be little more than school for
 divorce. Anything less and he'll
 think it's approval...Then I shall
 magnanimously take him back.

Lily changes graphic. Lily exits.

Violet enters and hurriedly crosses the stage, Rex enters in
 pursuit.

REX
 Violet! Violet!
 (to us)
 Who knew my wife was so
 interesting?

Violet, in the cat bird seat at last, turns and beams at us.

Rex and Violet exit. Rex changes graphic.

Graphic: LAST TEDIOUS MORALIZING LECTURE

Scene: College

Douglas enters and stands behind the lectern.

DOUGLAS

Why, yes, Mr. Cohn-Bertolli, there is a certain element of hypocrisy in the moral posturings of the authors in question, and quick of you to notice, too. But then what of it? Hypocrisy has a prime societal value. It keeps us adhering to values we don't really believe in but think our peers do. With racism in our hearts we decry those with racism on their lips. With lust in our loins we condemn those who get caught. This sanctimony keeps us from running through the streets like a pack of ravening hyenas...And did you know that both male and female hyena have the same external genitalia? I leave it to you to decipher the significance of that...Some of you may know that this will be my last lecture in this class. Due to certain family problems I will be leaving the college and moving to the city.

Douglas changes the graphic. Douglas exits.

Graphic: IT IS BETTER TO BEND THAN TO BREAK--NUDGE THE HUSBAND. IT'S ALMOST OVER

Scene: Bookstore

DOUGLAS

(continuing)

I'll never forget her. She is Woman to me, all I wanted, all I will ever want...My book is facing outward.

Girl enters. She stands next to Douglas, perusing the shelf.

DOUGLAS

(continuing; to us)

I think of my beloved Lily when I wake, I think of her when I work, I think of her when I go to bed.

(to Girl)

Have you tried this one?

He stoops to get to the Z's.

GIRL

I've read Zola.

DOUGLAS

This is Zweig.

(to us)

A large part of me is gone without her, I can not function as a full human being.

GIRL

(of the book)

This is you!

DOUGLAS

Alas.

(to us)

I will spend my life mourning her loss. I will spend my life struggling to win her back.

GIRL

(to us)

He looks so sad and artistic.

Lily enters. Douglas does not see her.

LILY

(to us)

I've changed my mind...When he left I took stock. Howard is at the age when he needs a father--or a jailer...My thighs now rub together when I walk. I can't wear corduroy for the noise...

DOUGLAS

(to us)

I'll never get over her. Never, ever. There will never be another...

GIRL

I've always wanted to write. You must be very smart.

DOUGLAS

(to us)

I've learned an invaluable lesson...what was it again?

GIRL

Where do you get your ideas?

LILY

(to us)

She's young enough to be my--slightly younger sister.

DOUGLAS
Oh, just from life.

GIRL
That's so funny!

She touches his arm.

DOUGLAS
(to us)
On the other hand, Lily never
really appreciated my talent.

LILY
Douglas! Doug!

He does not hear her.

GIRL
You have an eyelash.

DOUGLAS
(to us)
When the light catches her like
that...I've always wondered what
it would be like with a gymnast,
swimmer, ballerina, lumberjack.
Ess. Lumberjackess.

GIRL
I want to write sooo badly.

LILY
And that's how you'll write, too.
Doug! I forgive you!

DOUGLAS
(to us)
Oh, if I can just capture that
intensity of youth. It will
release me, transform me...

Girl smiles at him, then starts off. She goes halfway to the
exit, looks back at him, smiles beckoningly.

DOUGLAS
(continuing; to us)
Well, after all, it's been a whole
month.

Douglas follows the Girl.

LILY
Doug! Douglas!

He does not hear her. Girl exits, Douglas follows and exits. Lily is left alone on stage as the reality of being finally alone sinks in on her.

Music, the same 18th century refrain that began Act Two.

Rex and Violet dance on, doing the elaborate step. After a moment, Douglas dances on with the Girl. He does a bit of free lance twirling and heel-clicking, the others clap politely. Lily reaches out for Douglas but the dancers don't recognize her presence.

Suddenly Douglas comes up lame from a pulled muscle due to his exuberance. The other dancers continue. Girl looks at Douglas with disdain as he tries to keep up. The four of them whirl and swirl around Lily then dance off with Douglas falling behind and limping badly.

Lights fade, leaving a Spot on Lily, alone in the dark as the others dance off.

LILY

(continuing; to us)

Even though he doesn't deserve it,
I can't help worrying about him.
He's so clueless...To hell with
him! Who needs a husband? I will
join a book club instead...No,
I'll go back to work...No, I'll
travel and meet interesting
men...no, I'll never have anything
to do with another man...no, I'll
get a dog...

Douglas limps back on, no longer dancing.

DOUGLAS

(to us; of Girl)

She doesn't remember Kennedy's
assassination--she wasn't even
born! She thinks Nixon is an
actress!...I thought clubbing had
to do with cavemen...Lily never
minded my snoring. God, how I miss
her.

(to Lily, on one knee)

Abject whining and whinging.
Admission of grievous error.
Attempt to place blame on
evolutionary biology,
insufficient breast feeding, the
devil...Protestation of endless
fealty.

LILY
 (to us)
 I've been sleeping so soundly
 without his snoring.

DOUGLAS
 (to us)
 I can't find my keys. How do I
 iron a shirt? I have no clean
 socks...all our friends are hers...
 (to Lily)
 I love you.

LILY
 (to us, shrugs)
 They're so hard to train, it takes
 years to break one in.
 (to Douglas)
 You have hurt me very deeply.
 (to us)
 And scared the hell out of me.
 (to Douglas)
 I will distrust you for years
 until you're old enough that I
 don't care.

DOUGLAS
 That sounds like a good basis to
 build on.

Douglas embraces her.

DOUGLAS
 (continuing)
 I love you, Lily.

LILY
 Come on home, Douglas. I'll make
 up your bed in the guest room.

They start off together.

DOUGLAS
 Forever and ever and ever...

MUSIC is heard. GIRL dances on, doing a single to the
 familiar refrain. She eyes Douglas who can't help looking
 back at her as

Douglas, Lily exit. Girl keeps dancing and is joined by Rex
 and Violet, and then by Douglas and Lily as they enter again.
 All of them dance together as lights dim.

Lily changes the graphic.

Graphic: THE END: ALL RISE. THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE.

The actors take their bows doing a little dance for five.

CURTAIN

THE END