

TRIANGLES FOR TWO

Three Failures in Communication

By

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The following plays take place on the same set, a neutral space to represent a living room in a middle class suburb. The set decor will change only minimally--different pictures or throw pillows, for instance. The plays will be performed by the same two actors. It is recommended that they be presented without intermission.

The connections among the three plays in time and circumstance should not be pondered too literally. A bit of confusion is perfectly acceptable.

TRIANGLES FOR TWO

Cast List

Ideally all of the characters should be played by only two actors. Age can range from 40's to 60's.

To Wit and To Whom

Husband

Wife

Otis Proposes

Otis

Kate

Triangles for Two

He

She

TO WIT AND TO WHOM

SCENE: The living room of a suburban upper middle class home. Entrance from bedrooms on one side, from outdoors and kitchen on other side.

AT RISE: HUSBAND ENTERS from kitchen, holding newspaper. He saunters past a spot of moisture on the floor, looks down speculatively. A bath towel lies beside it. One slipper is a few feet away. The belt of a bathrobe is a few feet away in the other direction. In his mind, HUSBAND reconstructs the event that caused this litter then crosses to chair, sits, opens the newspaper. Pause. WIFE ENTERS from bedroom dressed in bathrobe and one slipper, crosses to spot on floor, picks up the bathrobe belt, puts it on, slips on the other slipper and uses towel clean to spot. She does not see HUSBAND who watches her silently.

HUSBAND

(Pause. Pause) Reading here about a man who put his wife through a wood chipper.

WIFE

(Startled) You startled me!

HUSBAND

Did I?

WIFE

Yes! That sort of thing is awfully rude.

HUSBAND

What sort of thing?

WIFE

Slipping up behind one. Barking at one.

HUSBAND

Barking, was I? I thought of it as conversational in tone.

WIFE

It would have been conversational in tone if we were having a conversation. As we weren't, it had the same effect as barking. I didn't know you were here.

HUSBAND

That would account for it.

WIFE

What?

HUSBAND

Being startled. Sudden discovery of the husband, bound to do it.

WIFE

You're home early.

HUSBAND
Not really.

WIFE
It's noon.

HUSBAND
I didn't go to work.

WIFE
I thought you did.

HUSBAND
Did you?

WIFE
Yes. I thought you'd gone.

HUSBAND
Strange.

WIFE
That is what you do. That's your routine. You get up
in the morning and go to work. That's your routine.

HUSBAND
Not all that regularly.

WIFE
You're a creature of habit in that regard. Morning
comes and off you go.

HUSBAND
Must be boring for you to watch. Must be tedious.

WIFE
Not at all. I rather count on it.

HUSBAND
Predictable, I would say.

WIFE
Dependable. (Pause)

HUSBAND
Bit of trouble for you? Spot of inconvenience?

WIFE
Not at all, glad to see you.

HUSBAND
I mean the floor.

WIFE
Ah.

HUSBAND

Standing there dripping, were you? Just dripping and dripping?

WIFE

Looking out the window. Thinking.

HUSBAND

Thinking of me?

WIFE

Thinking of you?

HUSBAND

Were you? At all?

WIFE

When?

HUSBAND

As you stood there, looking out the window. Thinking. Dripping.

WIFE

Was I thinking of you and dripping?

HUSBAND

I don't know. That's why I ask. In the spirit of inquiry.

WIFE

No. Not actually.

HUSBAND

Ah.

WIFE

I had thought of you earlier, though.

HUSBAND

That should be enough. Wouldn't want to overdo.

WIFE

Just not while I was dripping.

HUSBAND

(Pause) I notice a bit of a mark in the floor there.

WIFE

Really?

HUSBAND

What do you suppose that's from?

WIFE

This mark?

HUSBAND

What do you suppose that's from?

WIFE

I have no idea.

HUSBAND

Looks rather like a spur mark.

WIFE

A spur mark?

HUSBAND

Wearing spurs, were you?

WIFE

When?

HUSBAND

As you stood there, dripping.

WIFE

Why would I wear spurs?

HUSBAND

Better purchase, I suppose.

WIFE

You're thinking of crampons.

HUSBAND

Am I?

WIFE

Much better purchase with crampons. Not spurs.

HUSBAND

Good Lord, you're right. It must have been crampons.
Why would you be standing by the window in spurs?
(Pause) What were you thinking?

WIFE

When?

HUSBAND

When you were thinking of me.

WIFE

I thought you meant when I was looking out the window.

HUSBAND

No, no.

Pause. Pause. Wife thinks, Husband waits. Wife stops thinking and cleans up the mess.

WIFE

What did you bark at me when I came in?

HUSBAND

Ah. Reading here about a man who put his wife through a wood chipper.

WIFE

I don't believe it.

HUSBAND

Newspaper is taking that position.

WIFE

Seems hardly likely.

HUSBAND

The Times is quite adamant.

WIFE

Why, do you suppose?

HUSBAND

Apparently he had certain dissatisfactions.

WIFE

I don't imagine she was too pleased, either.

HUSBAND

Read about it, have you?

WIFE

Of course not.

HUSBAND

No...seems there was a lover.

WIFE

Hers or his?

HUSBAND

Hers? How interesting you would think that.

WIFE

Why?

HUSBAND

The usual reasons for taking a lover, I suppose. Lust, cosmic destiny, unspeakable boredom, that sort of thing.

WIFE

Why interesting that I would think she took a lover?
Women do.

HUSBAND

Do they? I thought only men did that.

WIFE

Whom do you think men take for lovers?

HUSBAND

You're quite right, of course, but still one finds it so annoying when you start a sentence with whom.

WIFE

Was she dead?

HUSBAND

When?

WIFE

When he put her through the chipper.

HUSBAND

At some point in the process, bound to be.

Pause. Pause. He returns to paper, she to mess.

WIFE

Strange.

HUSBAND

Hum?

WIFE

He was having the affair?

HUSBAND

Who?

WIFE

The man with the chipper.

HUSBAND

So the Times would have us believe. Hard to credit, but there it is.

WIFE

Very strange.

HUSBAND

Where are the old values, eh? Time was, a fellow wanted a bit of sexual diversion, he'd turn to the wife. Nowadays, of course, she's having none of it. ...Or not with her husband, at any rate.

WIFE

Why didn't she put him through the wood chipper?

HUSBAND

She was hardly in a condition to do so, having just been through it herself. He did think of it first, after all. She who hesitates and so forth.

WIFE

There's a lesson there, isn't there?

HUSBAND

Is there?

WIFE

I think so. (Pause. Pause.) Did he expect to get away with it?

HUSBAND

Oh, I should imagine. Say she's run away from home, people claim to see her at shopping malls over the years. The usual.

WIFE

So you never left the house at all, then?

HUSBAND

No. Not at all.

WIFE

Funny.

HUSBAND

Mildly amusing, perhaps...

WIFE

Funny that you didn't answer the phone.

HUSBAND

It rang, did it?

WIFE

Rang and rang. Finally the answering machine took it.

HUSBAND

Hard to imagine life without those machines, isn't it?

WIFE

Not particularly.

HUSBAND

No, I suppose not.

WIFE

It was a woman.

HUSBAND

Oh, yes?

WIFE

The same woman who calls you and hangs up when I answer. (Pause) She didn't leave a message.

HUSBAND

Busy, were you?

WIFE

When?

HUSBAND

When the phone rang and rang.

WIFE

I was standing by the window, thinking.

HUSBAND

Not of me, though.

WIFE

No, I'd already done that.

HUSBAND

(Pause) If she didn't leave a message, how did you know it was a woman?

WIFE

You're not having an affair with a man, are you?

HUSBAND

Certainly not. What a suggestion. (Pause) Still, a lot of that going around. Men at the station wearing clamps on their nipples under business suits, waiting for the eight-oh-three. (Pause) Where are the old values, eh? (Pause) How odd you would think that.

WIFE

I didn't.

HUSBAND

Still.

WIFE

(Pause) Is she anyone I know?

HUSBAND

I can't say. Her husband is an airline pilot.

WIFE

Does he know?

HUSBAND

Know what?

WIFE

His wife is having an affair.

HUSBAND

Is she, by God? I didn't realize.

WIFE

(Pause) Whom are you talking about?

HUSBAND

The lady who went through the chipper.

WIFE

Ah...I wasn't.

HUSBAND

Ah. (Pause) Are you sure "Whom are you talking about" is the right construction? Seems--unfelicitous.

WIFE

Felicity isn't everything in life.

HUSBAND

Quite right...Nor grammar, I suppose.

WIFE

Is she a good deal younger?

HUSBAND

Who?

WIFE

The woman on the phone.

HUSBAND

The one who doesn't speak?

WIFE

Is she a good deal younger?

HUSBAND

Younger than who?...mmm.(finishing word whom)

WIFE

Me, for instance.

HUSBAND

I, isn't it? (Pause) Younger than I? You would know.

WIFE

Yes, younger than I. You were right.

HUSBAND

Oh, good.

WIFE

(Pause) Is she?

HUSBAND returns to his newspaper, does not answer. After a pause, WIFE opens her robe to him, revealing herself. He slowly lowers newspaper, studies her.

HUSBAND

Yes, I'd say so.

WIFE sits facing HUSBAND with one leg thrown over arm of chair, revealing herself.

HUSBAND

(Pause) How have you been?

WIFE

When?

HUSBAND

Everything all right?

WIFE

Splendid.

HUSBAND

Good. (Pause) Would you like something?

WIFE

What did you have in mind?

HUSBAND

Doughnut?...Coffee?

WIFE

Do you have some?

HUSBAND

No...How's it going with the gardener? What's his name? Roger? How's it going with Roger?

WIFE

His name is Richard. But you know that.

HUSBAND

Why do you suppose I thought of Roger?

WIFE

His name is Richard (Dicky Bananas) Caputo.

HUSBAND

Oh, yes, I do remember. Dicky Bananas. Strange name for parents to give a child, don't you think? "What shall we name the little darling, sweetheart? Oh, how about Dicky Bananas?"

WIFE

I believe he was named for his godfather.

HUSBAND

Oh, a family name. Well, that explains it.

WIFE

You should remember his name, you hired him, after all.

HUSBAND

Did I? I suppose I did. Of course it wasn't his name I was most interested in at the time.

WIFE

In what were you interested?

HUSBAND

I was interested in his gardening skills, of course.

WIFE

Yes.

HUSBAND

And other things.

WIFE

Of course. You were interested in his other things.

HUSBAND

No Johnny one note, he.

WIFE

I should say not.

HUSBAND

He's developed into something more than just a gardener, after all, hasn't he?

WIFE

Oh, yes.

HUSBAND

His other skills have come in handy.

WIFE

Very handy.

HUSBAND

His way with the oboe, for instance. Those glorious solos, Mozart, Boccherini, Brahms. Plaintive tones, evocative sonorities, sweet, doleful music wafting up from the hydrangea and the snowball bush. Must say I envy you. All that mawkish gawp.

WIFE

He doesn't play the oboe.

HUSBAND

Doesn't he? I was certain he had a hobby.

WIFE

He shoots.

HUSBAND

Every man needs a hobby.

WIFE

He's very devoted to it.

HUSBAND

I don't think there's ever been a really first class solo oboist name Bananas. Not a really first class one.

WIFE

There's a good deal more to him than is readily apparent.

HUSBAND

Delighted to hear it. And you're getting on well, are you?

WIFE

Oh, yes. I'm getting to know him. He's revealing himself layer by layer. (Pause) Like an onion.

HUSBAND

What does he shoot?

WIFE

He hasn't told me yet.

HUSBAND

Still more secrets to learn?

WIFE

Oh, yes. Richard has more levels than a parking garage. You should get to know him. You should talk to him. The two of you should converse. You would find him delightful.

HUSBAND

I'm sure of it.

WIFE

You should solicit his opinions on various matters. How he feels about humus. The value of the earthworm in oxygenating the soil. You would be edified.

HUSBAND

How does he feel about the efficacy of wood chips as compost? Do you know at all? Have you discussed chips with him? Or has he been too busy with his oboe?

WIFE

He's never too busy for me. (Pause) You should get to know him better. You could learn from him.

HUSBAND

Actually, I had a bit of a chat with him today. Nothing deep. No philosophy. Just a chat.

WIFE

Really?

HUSBAND

Not a chinfest. Not a palaver. Just a chat. (Pause)
I asked him how he came to be standing naked in front of the window, dripping onto the floor.

WIFE

Did he have his oboe?

HUSBAND

No, he was naked. Except for his spurs.

WIFE

Not really naked then.

HUSBAND

Well...Principally.

WIFE

Strange.

HUSBAND

I thought so.

WIFE

Where do you suppose his oboe had got to?

HUSBAND

I had the impression he had already used it.

WIFE

I hope you didn't embarass him.

HUSBAND

I?

WIFE

Walking in on him, semi-naked.

HUSBAND

I was fully clothed, actually. (Pause) I said to him, Richard Dickie Bananas, what are you doing?

WIFE

You asked him, then.

HUSBAND

I wanted to know. It's my house. My living room. My view...Well, perhaps not my view, exactly, God's view, but certainly my window. Naturally I was curious why

HUSBAND (cont'd)

a complete stranger was standing naked in my living room usurping God's view. Do you feel I was too proprietary?

WIFE

He wasn't a complete stranger, of course. You hired him.

HUSBAND

I didn't hire him to drip. I hired him for matters horticultural. Besides, I didn't recognize him.

WIFE

You didn't recognize him? Even though you hired him? This man with whom you confer daily by the hydrangeas?

HUSBAND

You exaggerate.

WIFE

Daily confabs. I count on them. Up in the morning, off to work, home in the evening, out in the yard for a whispered discussion by the hedge, blue cigar smoke rising. I set my watch by these things. What do you discuss every day with this man whom you don't recognize in your own house?

HUSBAND

Agronomy.

WIFE

I am surprised you didn't recognize him.

HUSBAND

It's one thing to recognize a man by your hedge, quite another to know him naked in your living room.

WIFE

Who did you think he was?

HUSBAND

Not whom?

WIFE

Certainly not.

HUSBAND

I assumed he was a friend of yours.

WIFE

Standing naked? Why would a friend of mine be standing naked by the window?

HUSBAND

Couldn't imagine. That's why I asked him.

WIFE

What did he say?

HUSBAND

Said he had just taken a shower.

WIFE

There you are then.

HUSBAND

I said to myself, "he's very clean." Sudsing up in the middle of the day. Hosing down at noon. That's cleanly to a fault. Must be a fetish. Must hamper his work. Dashing off to the shower every whip stitch. Who's minding the garden while all this ablution is going on? What about the price of soap?

WIFE

You seemed to get quite worked up over the matter.

HUSBAND

Not at all. I scarcely thought about it.

WIFE

Does she ever speak of me?

HUSBAND

Who?

WIFE

The woman on the phone. When you're together. When you're panting together, when you've thrust your tongue in her ear, does she ever speak of me?

HUSBAND

Seems I misjudged him. It wasn't a fetish at all. He had gasoline on his clothes. He came in the house to get the gasoline off.

WIFE

Or afterwards, when you're lying together, when she's braiding the hair on your chest into little knots, does she ask about me?

HUSBAND

He says you told him to take his clothes off.

WIFE

I didn't want him to explode.

HUSBAND

I don't actually have that much hair on my chest.

WIFE

Don't you?

HUSBAND

No...Not for knotting. I have scarcely any hair on my chest at all. I have a body like porcelain.

WIFE

I must have been thinking of something else.

HUSBAND

You have often remarked upon it. You have said-- admiringly--that I have skin like fine china.

WIFE

Perhaps I said that I have skin like fine china.

HUSBAND

You said that I have skin like fine china.

WIFE

And that's what I meant.

HUSBAND

(Pause) Is he a Buddhist, by any chance?

WIFE

Who?

HUSBAND

Roger.

WIFE

(Pause) Dick.

HUSBAND

Given to self-immolation, is he? Protesting something in the inimitable Buddhist fashion?

WIFE

I believe he's a Unitarian. (Pause) I could be wrong. I've never asked. (Pause) I've sensed it.

HUSBAND

Do Unitarians set themselves alight?

WIFE

Occasionally, I suppose.

HUSBAND

Don't think of them in that way. Unitarians in their saffron robes torching themselves for justice in Tibet. (Pause) And you stopped him, did you?

WIFE

Stopped him?

HUSBAND

From immolating himself.

WIFE

Was he going to immolate himself?

HUSBAND

Why else would he douse himself with gasoline?

WIFE

I believe he spilled the gasoline while filling the backhoe.

HUSBAND

Ah. (Pause) So little self-sacrifice these days. I recall the days when men were lighting up for their principles at the drop of a placard. Where are the old values, where are they now, eh?

WIFE

I don't believe Roger has any principles. He works for money. He told me he works strictly for cash.

HUSBAND

A rather great deal of cash, actually. Rather too much for him to be taking showers on the job.

WIFE

Is it a big job?

HUSBAND

Which?

WIFE

The one you hired him to do. The one you're paying him rather a great deal of cash to perform. The one you confer about down by the hedge.

HUSBAND

Big job? (Pause) Not big, but important.

WIFE

He must be flattered, being hired for such an important job.

HUSBAND

He hasn't said. He doesn't talk much. Perhaps you've noticed.

WIFE

He talks to me.

HUSBAND

Does he?

WIFE

He talks rather a lot to me. He has had a great deal to say to me. He fairly rattles on in my presence.

HUSBAND

(Pause) I've found him quite mute.

WIFE

He has banter with me. Repartee.

HUSBAND

Really? I'm quite surprised. When do you have these talks? Not when he's playing his oboe, surely. Surely not.

WIFE

When he's taking his shower.

HUSBAND

Ah.

WIFE

And afterwards. When he's drying. When he's standing by the window, drying, and the water is running off his body in rivulets and streams, and coursing off his limbs in great surging rivers and cascades, and pouring from his trunk in raging floods and oceans... And when he dries his chest, that hairy chest, that rain forest of hair, that machete-thick Matto Grosso of hair sprouting and curling and craning upwards from the broad plain of his chest as if from the jungle floor, fetid and damp and rising, lifting, soaring up and up from that great hirsute hormone-oozing, pheromone-reeking primal monolithic steaming brute of a man.

HUSBAND

(Pause.) Are you quite sure you have the right man?

WIFE

Right for what?

HUSBAND

Are we speaking of the same man? This chap who showers and drips, this jungle dwelling brute of a man with the spurs--is he the same man I confer with whom by the snowball bush? (Pause) Because I sense a dissimilarity in your description. (Pause) Did you notice any distinguishing marks?

WIFE

Do you mean scars?

HUSBAND

Not only scars, not just scars, no. This dripping floor-flooder of yours who might or might not be the

HUSBAND (cont'd)

cigar puffing hedge trimmer, does he happen to sport a small tatoo?

WIFE

Yes, he does.

HUSBAND

Very high on the inner thigh?

WIFE

Quite high.

HUSBAND

(Pause) A scene from Brueghel of drunken peasants, about the size of a dime, bordered with an indecipherable script?

WIFE

(Pause) It's in Italian. "Ecco io!" Or, loosely, "here I am!"

HUSBAND

(Pause) Right thigh?

WIFE

Left thigh.

HUSBAND

He has deceived you. You have the wrong man.

HUSBAND stands by window, looking out.

HUSBAND

What do you suppose he is doing with the backhoe?

WIFE

(Joins him) Digging a hole.

HUSBAND

It's quite a large hole. (Pause. Pause.)
I remember a time when it would take a man a day to dig a hole that deep. One man, one shovel. A great deal of dirt. Pounds and pounds, I should think. Back-breaking work, of course. Mindless, thankless, brute dumb labor without craft or appreciation. At mid-day one would rest beside it, dangling one's feet into the abyss, perhaps, eating a dried salami and drinking filthy red wine. Staring vacantly into the emptiness one had wrought, brain-dead, sweating like an ox, reeking of garlic and superstition. Then, bottle down, wipe the grease from your face and back to it with a purpose. Still, when one was finished, one had a hole. One could stand on the edge and look down and say, "now there's a space with nothing in it. And I'm

HUSBAND (cont'd)

responsible for it. Were it not for me, that hole would not exist." (Pause) If a hole can be said to exist. Being an exercise in emptiness, as it were...Still, those were the days. Where have they gone, eh? Today any hired gunman can scoop out a hole with a backhoe in minutes and never reflect on the thing philosophically.

WIFE

Still, you can reflect on it.

HUSBAND

Yes, I can reflect on it, but I can hardly be expected to tour the countryside, reflecting on everyone else's hole. It's not my job, is it? I have other things to do...And what happens when I'm gone? (Pause. Pause) That is quite a large hole.

WIFE

Six feet.

HUSBAND

I'd call that quite large.

WIFE

It depends what you put in it. If you put a grand piano in it, for instance, it would be quite a small hole. It would be an altogether insufficient hole. It would scarcely serve a hole-like purpose at all.

HUSBAND

What is a hole-like purpose?

WIFE

That rather depends where the hole is placed. The purpose of a hole in the wall, for instance, would be fenestration.

HUSBAND

I was refering to a hole in the ground. What would be the hole-like purpose of a hole in the ground?... Generally...Theoretically...If you know.

WIFE

(Pause) Concealment. Interment. Entombment...Burial.

HUSBAND

What do you suppose Richard Dicky Bananas is going to bury, inter or conceal in that six foot hole?

WIFE

You, perhaps?

HUSBAND

Me?

WIFE

A yew tree. Perhaps he's going to plant a yew tree.

HUSBAND

Surely you're mistaken...A yew is a shrub, not a tree.

WIFE

Is it?

HUSBAND

Oh, yes.

WIFE

Are you certain?

HUSBAND

I'd stake my life on it.

WIFE

(Pause. Pause.) As you wish.

HUSBAND

(Pause. Pause.) I am more than six feet.

WIFE

Are you?

HUSBAND

Oh, yes. Considerably.

WIFE

Really?

HUSBAND

I am a great deal longer than six feet. It would be a mistake to think otherwise.

WIFE

How long are you?

HUSBAND

I am six feet and four inches.

WIFE

You don't look it.

HUSBAND

I carry it well. It is well distributed. My proportions are classical.

WIFE

I would have said you were a smaller man.

HUSBAND

No, no.

WIFE

If anyone had inquired about your length, I would have said six feet or less.

HUSBAND

That would have been a serious mistake. (Pause) You, on the other hand, are less than six feet.

WIFE

Does that include the root ball?

HUSBAND

(Pause) I am astounded. I am perplexed. To discover after all these years that you have a root ball. Why have I never noticed?

WIFE

Perhaps you never bothered to look. Perhaps you took things for granted. Perhaps there was a great deal going on beneath the surface that you never took into consideration when making your observations.

HUSBAND

You shock me. Such an accusation.

WIFE

Perhaps all of your calculations are wrong. Perhaps you have misjudged everything.

HUSBAND

(At window) He has finished digging the hole.

WIFE

Time to plant yew.

HUSBAND

He's coming towards the house.

WIFE

Perhaps he's coming for another shower. He quite enjoyed the last one.

HUSBAND

He has no more time for showers. He has all that wood to chip. That's why he was hired. That's why I'm paying him all that money.

WIFE

Maybe he's coming to play his oboe.

HUSBAND

There's no time for that. I'm paying him cash.

WIFE

Perhaps he prefers art to commerce.

HUSBAND

(Pause) Perhaps.

Together they watch the gardener come towards the house, slowly turning their heads to face the door where he will enter as

SLOW FADE TO BLACK

THE END

OTIS PROPOSES

SCENE: The same set as in the previous play. It is now KATE's apartment.

AT RISE: KATE is at coffee table, editing a manuscript. She is wearing earphones. DOORBELL RINGS, she does not hear it, continues to work. BELL RINGS AGAIN, pause, KNOCK on the door. Another pause, OTIS ENTERS, peering about. Otis is aging, his mind more quickly than the rest of him. His manner and speech are vaguely British.

OTIS

Hello? Kate? Ah, there you are. Looking pretty as a picture, good enough to eat, a sight for sore eyes.

KATE still has not noticed him. She speaks to the manuscript, attacks it with a pencil.

KATE

Redundant.

OTIS

Yes, well. Could be, could be. Still, a harsh greeting.

KATE

(Seeing him, screams) Otis!

OTIS

Good God, where!?! Oh, you mean me.

KATE

I didn't hear you come in.

OTIS

Slipped in quiet as a--uh--uh--I know the word, don't help. What is that thing that slips in?
Quiet as a--uh--uh...Silent. Silent as--uh--oh--it's a carol, you know it. (He hums "Oh come all ye faithful) Ta ta tata ta ta.

KATE

Otis?

OTIS

Yes, my dear?

KATE

What on earth are you talking about?

OTIS

Haven't a clue. Something musical, was it?

KATE

Sit down, Otis. Would you like something to drink?

OTIS

Wouldn't want to put you to any trouble.

KATE

It's no trouble, I'll just pour it. What would you like?

OTIS

If you insist. Perhaps a creme de menthe frappe.

KATE

(Gives him a look) I'll see what I can do. I'll just be a minute.

KATE EXITS. OTIS STANDS, mutters to himself for a moment, rehearsing what he had planned to say. Then, for practice, he sinks to one knee, taking ring box from his pocket in one hand, stretching the other towards the imaginary Kate in the classic position of a marriage proposal.

OTIS

Introductory remarks, yattada yattada, a few endearments, list of my virtues--take a while, that, hah-hah--perhaps, an anecdote, no no, straight to the point. In short my dear, would you do me the very great honor of becoming....

KATE (O.S.)

What?

OTIS

(Startled) What?

KATE POKES HEAD IN.

KATE
What?

OTIS
What?

KATE
What did you say? I didn't hear you.

OTIS
Didn't hear me?

KATE
I heard you, I didn't understand you. But then that's often the case... What are you doing on the floor?

OTIS
Ahhh--noticed a bit of a mark here. Gouge, really. Looks like a golf divot, I'd say. Practice in the house, do you?

KATE
That was here when I moved in. It looks like spur marks to me.

OTIS
I would have said an eight iron. Had a bit of problem like that at home myself. Carpet's the answer. Ceiling's too low for a full driver, but if you choke down on a wedge...

KATE
I'll get your drink.

KATE EXITS. OTIS tries to rise, but his joints are locked in position. He tries to pull himself off one knee with his hands, scoots along the floor a bit on one knee, finally manages to get himself into a chair just as KATE ENTERS.

KATE
Here you are. Is mineral water all right?

OTIS
Perfect.

KATE

Are you okay? You look a little flushed.

OTIS

In the pink.

KATE

Before we go to dinner, Otis, I absolutely have to finish editing this story Carter wrote about the illegal golf ball. I promised Shep I'd have it for him first thing in the morning. You don't mind, do you?

OTIS

Right you are, business first.

KATE

You'll forgive me if I wear these? It helps me to concentrate. It's a tape of the Ganges River. In India?

OTIS

Holy river, monks in breech-cloths bathing themselves. Spend all that time in the water but the odor on these chaps. Smell like what the dog had for dinner. Try a little soap, swami. That the Ganges you mean?

KATE

(Cooly) This is where the river runs through Benares. Where Yogi Hatchhadanandaramasamalama lives and teaches.

OTIS

Reincarnation, karma, all that yoga twaddle. Spend a bad life, come back as a cockroach, isn't that it?

KATE

Or a publisher.

OTIS

What? Oh, yes, a publisher, me you mean, ha-ha. Well, still, the thing is, live like a swine, come back as a bug, all very well so far, no argument there, but then

OTIS (cont'd)

what, eh? That's where the whole thing falls apart.
How do you get back to human again? Live a good life
as a bug? Perform good works when you've got six legs?
It would take all your concentration just to walk.

KATE

(Stifling her annoyance) Still, some of us like it.
(of earphones) I'll just put it on, then, all
right? I can still hear you.

KATE puts on earphones, looks at the manuscript.

OTIS

You can hear me then?

KATE

(Removes earphones) What?

OTIS

You can hear me all right with those on?

KATE

Oh, yes. (Puts them on.)

OTIS

Saw a man drive off with a wood chipper when I arrived.
Thought for a moment he came from here. Must have
been next door. Make a dreadful racket, those machines.
Sounds like someone screaming.

KATE

What?

OTIS

Chipper?

KATE

Not bad, thank you. (Returns to manuscript)

OTIS

I read that article Carter wrote about the illegal
ball. Damned good. Fine man, Carter, fine man. Bit of a
hormone problem, of course. Willing to rut with a
flagpole. Still, excellent writer.

KATE

(Not hearing him) Carter's a moron.

OTIS

He has that one drawback. Although, in a writer, one must say, nothing surprising there. Still, Carter does overdo. I saw him making a play for what's her name? The girl in accounting? You know, the one with the hairy legs? Woman absolutely refuses to shave. Her choice, of course, still and all, come summer and the tank tops, one hopes she doesn't hail a cab. Still, Carter doesn't seem to mind. Of course the man requires little more sexual stimulus than a pulse beat. He did seem to be making some headway, I must say. She was looking at him as moon-faced as--well--the moon.

KATE

(Removes earphones) What are you talking about?

OTIS

Oh, that young woman, what's her name, you know her name, you have lunch with her, name of an animal, what's it called? Not a zebra, nothing like a zebra, that's not it, but it's close. More like the other thing, see here, on the savannah, bounding about (on his feet) bounding, bounding.

KATE

Main?

OTIS

Mane? You're thinking of a lion. See here, picture this, darkest Africa, Serengeti plains, elephants, crocodiles, what not, then here they come, bounding, bounding--oh, come on! Famous bounders! What do you call them? King Solomon's Mines, Deborah Kerr crouched behind a tree trunk, forest fire in the distance or something, who's to say, then here they come, vast quantities of them, bounding, bounding, right over the tree trunk, right over Deb, thought I'd die from excitement. From there straight to the beach and Burt Lancaster, very sexy that, pawing each other in the waves. Beautiful woman, love of my youth. Wonder what became of her? Bit long in the tooth, now, I suppose.

KATE
Otis?

OTIS
Yes, my dear?

KATE
What are you talking about?

OTIS
That girl from accounting. Giselle. Thought I told you.

KATE
Why are you talking about Giselle?

OTIS
Just remarking that Carter and she, she and Carter,
bit of a thing going on there, bit of an item.

KATE
I don't think so.

OTIS
Oh, yes. Things heating up there, trysts in the copy
room, so on.

KATE
I believe you're wrong.

OTIS lays a finger beside his nose, then points it upward.

OTIS
Time will tell.

KATE
Otis, listen to me. There is no truth to that rumor.
Carter is not interested in her. Take my word for it.

OTIS
Best speak to Carter about that.

KATE
I have, actually. He assures me there is nothing going
on. This is a subject I know a little something about,
all right?

OTIS

Certainly.

KATE

Thank you. (She puts earphones on)

OTIS

(Pause) You've been talking to Carter, then? (Pause)
 Didn't realize. Thought I had the path to myself, but
 of course a lovely woman like yourself, bound to have
 suitors. Still, Carter. Like mating with a bull
 elephant seal. All very well for the moment, I
 suppose, but then off he waddles, a whole harem to
 attend to. Giselle in accounting, to mention just one.
 Not what you need, Kate. He does have youth on his
 side, of course, but youth is such a tawdry asset,
 don't you find. Any lout has his share. Now a man
 like myself, aged in the wood. Aged everywhere else,
 come to that. Still, if it's rampant lust you want,
 seek no further. After the wife passed on I thought
 the old boy was dead too, but since I met you, well,
 happy to report, he's not dead, only been recumbent.
 These last few weeks I've been like a man with three
 thighs.

Kate looks up from her work, smiles at Otis.

OTIS(cont'd)

See here, Kate. I want to say--Hear me all right, can
 you?

KATE

What? (Removes earphones)

OTIS

Hear me all right?

KATE

Yes, fine. (Puts earphones back on)

OTIS

Good. Been meaning to say...

KATE

What did you want to do tonight?

OTIS

Aha, well, yes, there's the thing...

KATE

Anything is fine with me.

OTIS

(Softly) Sure you can hear me?

KATE concentrates on manuscript, can not hear him.

OTIS (cont'd)

Thought we'd make the beast with two backs, don't mean the camel, ha-ha. Bit of the old jolly roger. Bit of the soggy moss, eh?

KATE

(Still viewing manuscript) Anything at all is fine with me.

OTIS

Bend you over the sink, make barnyard sounds.

KATE

(Studying script) I'm game for anything.

OTIS

Dress like a rooster, sing cock a doodle do.

KATE

How about seafood?

OTIS

Show you my giant squid, my dear. Put it on a platter with parsley and lemon, enough to serve a party of six.

KATE looks up from manuscript again, smiles.

KATE

I don't know why, I just feel like it.

OTIS

Happen to feel that way myself. Ready as an oyster at low tide.

KATE

You don't mind, do you? (Removes earphones)

OTIS

Whatever you want is fine with me, my dear.

KATE favors him with a radiant smile, he beams back.

KATE

(Earphones back on) I'm almost done.

OTIS

Ready to burst, myself.

KATE

(Not looking up) You know, Otis, I've been meaning to tell you how very grateful I am for these dinners together. When I first came to the magazine I felt like such a stranger. You know what it's like, everyone has already formed relationships, no one is sure how to readjust things to take in an outsider--or even whether to take her in at all. It's like being adopted into a family when you're already an adult, they want you in some sense, or you wouldn't be there, but still... and then you took me under your wing the way you did. It was so sweet, I can't tell you.

OTIS

Oh, well,

KATE

I was very touched. I am very touched.

OTIS

Not yet touched by me, let me point out. But then Mongo and I have hopes.

KATE

Do you know what I like best about you, Otis?

OTIS

Great steaming virility?

KATE

(Removes earphones, looks up, turns to see Otis behind her) What?

OTIS

What?

KATE

Did you say something?

OTIS

Good Lord, did I?

KATE

Something about virility?

OTIS

Ah. Senility. Said I was fast approaching it. Ha-ha.

KATE

You mustn't say that about yourself. People will take you seriously...Do you know what I like most about you?

OTIS

Host of choices, eh?

KATE

I like the fact that you are so undemanding. You don't want anything from me. That's so unusual in a man. Most of them are--well, you know what they're like.

OTIS

The swine.

KATE

But you're different. I don't know if that's because of your age or if you're just a genuinely decent, gentle man.

OTIS

Age?

KATE

Well, you know what I mean.

OTIS

Still a bit of steam in the boiler, you know.

KATE

I don't mean that you're old. But I do like maturity in a man.

OTIS

Wisdom of the years. Rock of ages, cleft for me.

KATE

Roger, for instance.

OTIS

Roger?

KATE

My ex-husband.

OTIS

Thought his name was Dickie, for some reason.

KATE

My ex-husband, who I am certain was named Roger, was one of those men who just never grow up. You know what I mean.

OTIS

Certainly. Never grew up. See it all the time. Must be a curse.

KATE

That's putting it mildly. It's like being married to a child.

OTIS

Poor thing. Must play hob with the psyche.

KATE

Well, the psyche is the whole problem, isn't it?

OTIS

That and the clothes, I should think.

KATE

The clothes?

OTIS
Hard to find them?

KATE
The clothes?

OTIS
How short was he?

KATE
About six feet.

OTIS
Well, there you have it, damned near impossible to find a suit to fit a man--six feet? You call that short?

KATE
No, I don't call that short.

OTIS
See here, you told me Dickie never grew up.

KATE
I meant he never matured.

OTIS
Oh. Thought you'd married a pygmy. Well, that's broad-minded of her, I said. A lesson to us all. Still, didn't work out, did it? Cultural conflicts, that sort of thing. Always dicey, so many differences. Where to live? In town? In the bush? What of the children? A brave woman to take on all those problems. Had to have been true love in the beginning. Blinds us all, love does. Heat of passion, pumping of the heart, blood pounding in the ears, hard to tell the forest for the trees in that state. Or, in the case of your pygmy, hard to tell the rain forest for the trees.

KATE
Otis.

OTIS
Yes, my dear.

KATE

I did not marry a pygmy. I married an Italian. He was not stunted in growth. He was emotionally immature.

OTIS

I quite understand, have the whole picture now. (Pause)
No language problem?

KATE

An Italian American. He was semi-fluent--if you count hand gestures...Weren't we talking about something?

OTIS

Weren't we?

KATE

I thought we were.

OTIS

Could have sworn it. Heard voices, that sort of thing.

KATE

Oh, yes. I was telling you how much these dinners have meant to me.

OTIS

Have they really?

KATE

You've been so kind, so gentle, so patient. I know I did an enormous amount of whining in the beginning.

OTIS

Not at all. I loved listening to you.

KATE

You must have been pretty fed up with my divorce and all of that.

OTIS

Just wanted to help you, my dear.

KATE

Well, you did, and I'm very grateful. I went through an awful lot of anxiety at first, coming back into the work force after all these years, exorcising Dickie, trying to fit into the family at the office.

OTIS

You fit in marvelously, scads of friends, all of that.

KATE

Not really scads.

OTIS

All the men talk about you.

KATE

I'm not interested in that...Do they, really?

OTIS

Pretty woman, bright, friendly, single. Well, more than pretty, quite beautiful really.

KATE

Otis, are you blushing?

OTIS

Shy, you know, despite the poise.

KATE

I haven't seen a man blush since I was a teenager. I didn't know they could. I thought the blood was always rushing somewhere else.

OTIS

What? Yes, I see!

KATE

I don't really have scads of friends, you know. I'm friendly with a lot of people at the office, but that's not the same. I don't actually like very many of them, I'm just trying to get along. Is that horribly hypocritical of me?

OTIS

I understand perfectly.

KATE

How could you? You get along so easily with everyone.

OTIS

Me? Not at all.

KATE

I see you just chattering away all the time.

OTIS

Chattering, yes. Can't stand the silence, you see.

KATE

Really?

OTIS

Dread it. Two people standing there, nothing to say, awkward as a--how do you say, big beast, famously awkward, looks like...

KATE

It doesn't matter.

OTIS

Quite right. Hate those silences, make me nervous as a, uh, thing. Except with the wife. I could be silent with her, very comfortable with her. Seemed to know what we were thinking without all the constant dithering. She'd just give me a touch, calm me down like a man with a dog. Amazing what a human touch can do.

KATE

You were very lucky in your marriage, Otis.

OTIS

Blessed. Didn't always appreciate it at the time.

KATE

Do you think of her a lot?

OTIS

The wife?...Ruth...Ruthie...Miss her...Miss her...Miss her.

KATE

(Pause) Isn't it wonderful that we can talk this way to each other? I've always felt I could talk to you, I don't know why, but I just trusted you right from the beginning. There are so few men a woman can really, really talk to. And at the office, there's only you and Billy.

OTIS

Billy?

KATE

Billy in the art department? With the dyed blond hair?

OTIS

La de da Billy? See here, Kate, you're not suggesting that Billy and I, I and Billy...

KATE

You share that wonderful quality of really listening to a woman.

OTIS

Oh, yes?

KATE

It's a sensitivity to the pain of others that men just don't have. They're always thinking of themselves and how they can get you into bed.

OTIS

The animals.

KATE

But not you, Otis.

OTIS

No, no.

KATE

Nor Billy.

OTIS

See here, about Billy....

KATE

One of the things I've discovered since the divorce is how badly I need someone who understands me. Roger didn't understand me, he made no attempt to understand me, he didn't want to understand me, he just wasn't interested...But I need someone who can understand me right down to my core. My soul cries out for understanding. I can't live without it anymore...

OTIS

I understand you, Kate.

KATE

I believe you do, a little. And do you know why? I've discovered it's the outsiders of this world who care the most. Those who have been rejected by society --just as I was rejected by Roger. The people whose souls have been seared by pain and humiliation--those are the people who can really give love to others in pain.

OTIS

Seared like a rump steak myself.

KATE

This society is so cruel to anyone who doesn't fit into the mold. Well, I don't fit. It took me years and years to realize it, but I know it now, I don't fit, either.

OTIS

Me neither.

KATE

Do you feel that way, too?

OTIS

Been a square peg all my life.

KATE

Really?

OTIS

Couldn't be more of a misfit. Just like that man in the movie. Who-do-call-him, with the mustache. Oh, you know, ears sticking out like tree mushrooms. "Damn you, Scarlett," something like that.

KATE

You do know what I'm talking about, don't you, Otis?

OTIS

(He doesn't, but he covers) Ahhhh...

KATE

The sense of not being one of the mainstream.

OTIS

Quite. Complete black sheep, myself.

KATE

And why I have such a good rapport with Billy.

OTIS

Just to clear up the Billy business. Wouldn't want you to think our connection is all that close. Billy is essentially of a different persuasion, if you follow. I may have had the odd encounter as a youth, early confusion, any port in a storm, that sort of thing; once and a while in a circle, several of the fellows. No kissing, though, thinking all the while of Virginia Mayo, of course. Mind firmly fixed there, no question. All boys, oddly macho sort of thing, actually. And there was the time with the roommate in college, hardly counts, terribly drunk.

KATE

(Kisses him lightly) Thank you, Otis.

OTIS

(Rises, anticipating more) Ah, well...

KATE

I came to work for the magazine and felt as if I didn't have a friend in the world but over the past few weeks I've come to realize I have a very special friend indeed.

OTIS

More than a friend, my dear.

KATE

Yes, much more than a friend.

OTIS
More of a soulmate.

KATE
Do you feel that way, too?

OTIS
Been wanting to tell you. Fair bursting with it.

KATE
Then I don't need to explain to you.

OTIS
Say no more. I understand completely.

KATE
I'm so glad.

OTIS
I'm a very happy man, my dear.

OTIS embraces her. She hugs him back.

OTIS
I have something in my pocket for you, my dear.

KATE
It started so simply. Just a few friendly meals together. It all seemed so natural.

OTIS
Perfectly natural.

KATE
So normal. Then I realized I began to feel something. I was so surprised. After the divorce and everything.

OTIS
Yes.

KATE
You think you'll never feel anything again, certainly never want to get involved with anyone again. And then this of all things.

OTIS

Damned surprising.

KATE

I tried to fight it, of course.

OTIS

Give in to the heart.

KATE

But not to this.

OTIS

Why not?

KATE

It seemed so odd.

OTIS

Now, see here. Not all that odd.

KATE

I mean the sexual aspects of it.

OTIS

Nothing odd there. Spiritual affinity with Billy aside, I'm a screaming hetero, you know. Have the bona fides, two daughters, Karen and um, oh, um, lovely child...

KATE

And I had been so angry at men.

OTIS

Perfectly justified. Pack of rotters.

KATE

(Kisses him lightly) So I just want to say thank you. For being so sweet, for being so kind. For everything. Just for being you, Otis, whatever that is...People will talk, of course.

OTIS

Let them and be damned to them.

KATE

You won't mind then?

OTIS

Why should I?

KATE

You won't be embarrassed by me?

OTIS

On the contrary! Proud as a--um--the bird, the bird...

KATE

And you'll still be my friend?

OTIS

Bit more than that, I should say.

KATE

When you think about it, women with women just makes more sense.

OTIS

Women with women?

KATE

I've tried to get along with men all my life. They're just so much trouble.

OTIS

I seem to have lost the thread a bit. Women with women is intriguing, of course, can't deny it. But I thought at first, something a little more straight forward. Always time for a guest later, I suppose. The wife liked a bit of the thing with the oranges and the blindfold--what do you call that--

KATE

What are you talking about?

OTIS

Where one of you hides in the closet, the other has a blindfold and a handful of oranges...you don't know that one?

KATE

It's not really about that, though, is it?

OTIS

What? No. Perfectly right.

KATE

It's about basic human communication.

OTIS

Quite right.

KATE

It's about I love you and you love me, and what do we do about it.

OTIS

(Goes to one knee) By God, Kate, straight to the point. You shame me with your directness.

KATE

Why are you on the floor?

OTIS

See here, Kate, I had a speech prepared but can't remember it now anyway. The thing is, I'm lonely, you know. Want someone in my life. Don't want to carry on about it, but...nights are hellish. Get a little frightened sleeping alone...strange, isn't it, a man my age? Afraid of the dark. Well, not the dark, just the--emptiness. Like a monster waiting for me, all that time alone... See here, not very romantic that. The point is, as you put it, you love me and I love you and damn it, I say, let's get married and put an end to it.

KATE

(Long Pause) Otis...you haven't been listening to me, have you?

OTIS

Listening like a hawk.

KATE

But...I've been trying to tell you. I love you--but not in that way. I'm in love with someone else.

OTIS
Carter, that Spanish fly?

KATE
Not Carter. I love Giselle.

OTIS
Giselle?

KATE
Yes. Giselle.

OTIS
Giselle in accounting? The one with the...?

KATE
With the what?

OTIS
See here, correct me if I'm wrong--don't want to belabor the obvious, but damn it, Giselle's a woman.

KATE
Yes.

OTIS
As are you.

KATE
Yes.

OTIS
Well there you have it then. Need I say more?

KATE
All my life what I had been looking for was a man with the sensitivity of a woman. Someone I could really talk to, really trust, a man with whom I could share my tears and my fears the way I could with my girl friends. Then I finally realized, if it was the sensitivity of a woman I was after, why look for it in a man? Oh, Otis, it just makes so much sense, don't you see?

OTIS

Can't say that I do, damn it. Not really part of nature's grand design, you know. Puts a real short circuit in the procreation business.

KATE

It's not about child-bearing. It's about warmth and understanding and affection. Do you know any straight man who can give a woman affection without expecting it to turn into sex?

OTIS

That's the whole point, isn't it?

KATE

Not for a woman.

OTIS

Don't know how Carter is going to take this, he has his cap set for Giselle himself. (Amused) Makes him a bit of a fool, doesn't it? Chasing around after a... (Realizes) Best be going on home, then. Sorry to have wasted your time.

KATE

Don't go.

OTIS

It's the best thing. Just toddle on off.

KATE

Why must you go?

OTIS

Damned embarrassed, that's why! You played me for a fool, Kate! Used me, led me on, treated me like a clown.

KATE

Oh, no...

OTIS

Yes, by god. I know I appear something of the buffoon to some, but I have my feelings, I do, I have them and you've just ripped them up, Kate. Don't appreciate it, don't appreciate it at all.

KATE

Because I love someone else?

OTIS

Because of who you love! See here, if that's how you felt, why'd you let me carry on the way I did? All those dinners...

KATE

I thought you liked me, I thought you liked being with me.

OTIS

I did, damn it. More the fool, I. Must say you're repaid my affection with a bit of sand in the eye.

KATE

Otis, please...Don't leave.

OTIS

Why not?

KATE

I need you.

OTIS

No longer, it seems.

KATE

I need you now more than ever. Do you know what my life is going to be like when people know about Giselle? Who will be my friend then?

OTIS

Giselle and Billy, I should think.

KATE

That's not enough. I still want a complete life, I don't want to cut myself off from that world. I want to see things through your eyes, too.

OTIS

You want me as some sort of peephole on the world.

KATE

It's more than that...I like you, Otis. I genuinely like you. You're sweet and kind and silly...

OTIS

You want to use me!

KATE

Haven't you been using me?

OTIS

No, by God, I hadn't got around to it yet.

Otis starts off.

KATE

Otis, stay!

OTIS

What do I get out of it?

KATE

You won't be lonely anymore.

OTIS

Lonely? I'm not lonely.

OTIS storms out.

KATE

Then go on and to hell with you!

Pause. Pause. Otis returns.

OTIS

See here, not fair, what you're asking. Asking me to be a what do you call it.

KATE

Otis, we're not children. There's more than one way to get through life. Help me, stay with me, be my friend. Not my suitor, just my friend.

OTIS

Friends with a woman? Never done that, actually.

KATE

You were friends with your wife, weren't you?

OTIS

Ruthie? My best friend. Maybe my only real friend my whole adult life.

KATE

And was that just because of sex?

OTIS

Oh, no.

KATE

In fact, how much actual sex was there after the first few years?

OTIS

What? What are you implying? We went at it like rodents...

KATE

(Softly) Otis.

OTIS

Not terribly much, actually.

KATE

You just liked being with her.

OTIS

Loved her.

KATE

Can't you keep liking me? Please? Can't we keep on with the dinners, the talks?

OTIS

To what end?

KATE

As an end in itself. Just friendship.

OTIS

(Pause. Contemplatively) Friends with a woman.

KATE

(Pause, contemplatively) Friends with a man.

OTIS

What an unusual concept.

KATE

You've been doing it with me for weeks.

OTIS

But always with the prospect of the old rummy-rum somewhere in the future. Makes a man tolerant of all kinds of twaddle if he thinks there's a payoff...None of the old two-backed goolagong?

KATE

No.

OTIS

No possibility?

KATE

None.

OTIS

(Pause) Bit of a relief, that. (Pause)
Could be interesting. Never one to shy from a challenge myself. Bit of a what's-his-name in my youth. Bring-em-back-alive type, into the savannah, armed only with a loyal native, Frank someone, oh, it's an animal, the one with the thingums, what do you call that....

She touches him.

KATE

(Soothingly) Otis, I understand.

OTIS

You do?

KATE

Yes, I do.

A slow smile suffuses his face and he is at peace.

CURTAIN

THE END

TRIANGLES FOR TWO

SCENE: The same as preceding plays.

AT RISE: HE is looking out the window, peering at something in the distance. HE is alone on stage for a moment. His attitude gradually changes from curiosity to reflection. SHE enters quietly, watches him for a moment.

SHE
I'm almost ready.

HE
(Startled, thus angry) What are you doing,
sneaking around like that?

SHE
Sorry if I frightened you.

HE
I wasn't frightened, I don't get frightened
by sudden noises, Jesus.

HE returns his attention to the window.

SHE
Do I look too sexy for the occasion?

SHE pirouettes to show off her outfit.

HE
(Absently) No.

SHE
Do I look sexy at all?

HE
No, you look fine...They've hired a gardener now.

She crosses to look out window.

HE (cont'd)
How can they afford that? How can everybody we
know seem to afford every damn thing they want
while we're so deep in debt we can't see over it?

SHE
Why do you suppose they need a gardener?

HE
To trim the hedges, apparently. I don't understand
it, I just don't get it. He doesn't make any more
money than I do, but he spends like an Arab. If we
go over there we'll probably find he's hired a
footman.

SHE

How do you know he doesn't make more money than you do?

HE

Because he doesn't, look at him. He must plan on coming into an inheritance or something.

SHE

Maybe she has money. She acts like she comes from money. She's very refined.

HE

Refined? Refined? Jesus. You call that refined?

SHE

I sense some pressure not to. How would you describe her?

HE

Affected. Snooty. I always feel like she's going to correct my grammar.

SHE

Always?

HE

What?

SHE

You said you always feel that way. Do you talk to her a lot?

HE

Just that once, when we had them over, right after they moved in.

SHE

Oh. It sounded like...

HE

Have you been talking to them?

SHE

No...We wave sometimes...She seems nice.

HE

She can't very well correct your wave, can she?

SHE

He seems a little more distant.

HE

Thank God for that. I sure as hell don't want to get anywhere near him. He gives me the creeps.

SHE

Maybe we should make more of an effort to get to know them.

HE

We made an effort. We had them over for drinks, didn't we?

SHE

That was five years ago.

HE

Let them make the effort. We were here first...Oh, here comes his lordship now. A little gardening conference, no doubt.

SHE

He's rather attractive, isn't he?

HE

That stiff? He looks like a glass of iced tea.

SHE

I meant the gardener.

HE

(Studies gardener) What is he wearing, a hair shirt? Looks like a gorilla.

PAUSE. They are noticed by the neighbors. HE and SHE both wave cheerfully.

SHE

Hi! Hi!

HE

(Waving) Is that a backhoe? Jesus! Where does everybody else get the money?

SHE

(Waving) Beautiful evening...I said, "beautiful evening!"

HE

(Steps away) Come away from there. Look at them staring at us. I feel like I'm being spied on in my own house. We have to build a fence.

SHE

Sometimes I feel as if they're living in our house--or we're living in theirs. Do you ever feel that?

HE

How can he afford a backhoe? We can't even get the floor redone.

SHE

What's the matter with the floor?

HE

It looks like someone's been walking over it with cleats is all. Look at that gouge. When did that happen?

SHE

It's only been there for ten years.

HE

It has? Looks like someone took a pick ax to it.

SHE

You don't remember what happened?

HE

Uh...not really.

SHE

It was Halloween, little Dickie was dressed as a cowboy and he was using your golf club as a horse and you came in with the hedge clippers and yelled "not with my 8-iron!" and his spurs got tangled up and the golf club knocked the hedge clippers...I can't believe you don't remember that.

HE

Oh, yeah.

SHE

What *do* you remember of the last twenty years?

HE

In the real world, trying to pay for the coffee table and the stitches.

SHE is looking out the window, contemplatively.

HE

What?

SHE

Nothing.

HE

I can always tell when you're thinking.

SHE

That's not hard, I'm always thinking.

HE

What did I do now?

SHE

Do you ever wonder what it's like over there?
In their house?

HE

No.

SHE

Don't you ever wonder what their life is like?
They seem happy together. How do they do it?

HE

I wonder how they can afford it.

SHE

Don't you, when you see people sitting together
in the movies and he puts his arm around her; or
when they're walking and he holds her hand, don't
you ever wonder about them? Aren't you curious
about their lives, what they do to stay together,
how they manage to still feel that way?

HE

Believe me, you don't want to know about
anybody else's life. It'd curdle your blood.

SHE

But I do.

HE

I put my arm around you in the movies. (She is
silent.) Or I would if we ever went to the movies
anymore...I do...You don't expect me to put my
arm around you when we're watching television,
do you?

SHE looks at him, looks back at the window.

HE (cont'd)

It's an entirely different medium...Believe me
none of these goons you're talking about are
any happier than we are.

SHE

Maybe you're right.

HE

You bet I'm right. Can you think of any couple
you'd call happy--present company excepted,
of course?

SHE

Of course...Tina and Tom are happy.

HE

Tom's an alcoholic. He doesn't know if he's happy or not.

SHE

The Weddells. They're always so perky.

HE

A pair of cheerleaders. Give them some pom-poms and they'll have us on our feet doing the wave...Besides, he's having an affair.

SHE

No.

HE

He was seen with her in a restaurant in Greenwich.

SHE

I don't believe it. Tony Weddell?

HE

With a girl who works in the booth at the drive-in photo place.

SHE

Poor Mary Lou.

HE

I feel sorry for the girl at the drive-in. Can you imagine making love with Tony Weddell cheering you on?

SHE

(Pause; quietly) Yes.

HE

What?

SHE

I see your point...They looked so good together.

HE

Face it, we're as good as it gets. You and I are the last happy couple in America.

SHE

How do we do it?

HE studies HER a moment to see how sarcastic that remark was.

HE

We know our limitations. Don't look for more than you have, be content with what you've got.

SHE

You never secretly want something else? I mean honestly now.

HE

What would I want?

SHE

You never yearn for--oh, I don't know--someone exotic, a house in Tahiti, something, anything, better. Maybe not even better, just different.

HE

You mean, do I secretly want a beautiful 24-year-old blonde with legs that could wrap around me twice and an ass as tight as a hospital bed sheet? Never. I love you just the way you are.

SHE

You can be very cruel.

HE

It's a joke! A joke! You brought it up, I was just teasing you.

SHE

Sometimes I think you don't like me at all.

HE

Don't be crazy. Of course I like you.

SHE

Of course.

HE

We're married.

SHE

I see. You'd better get ready if we're going to be there on time.

HE

Do we have to go? I don't want to see those people tonight.

SHE

What do you mean, "those people." They're our friends. You like them.

HE

Who's going to be there I like?

SHE

You like Murray.

HE

Murray is a blow-hard hostile son-of-a-bitch. Have you ever heard him say anything nice about anybody?

SHE

(Pause) Otis will be there.

HE

Otis has the attention span of a newt.

SHE

I think he's rather sweet. Most women do.

HE

Christ, you mention the Red Sox to him and the next thing you know he's asking you the name of the fifth Pope or something. If he didn't have such a good job, someone would have him committed.

SHE

If he has such a good job he can't be all that bad.

HE

It's not that good a job. Don't kid yourself,

SHE

I like that woman he's with. Kate?

HE

How does he do it?

SHE

There's something, I don't know, very appealing about her. Something different.

HE

I've noticed.

SHE

You have?

HE

...Not particularly...Seriously, we have to go to this thing?

SHE

These are our friends. Friendship has certain requirements. One of them is that you act friendly now and again. People don't require much, really.

HE

I can't deal with that hypocrisy. I don't like those people.

SHE

You don't have to like your friends. Just be sociable. If it was up to you we'd have no social life at all.

HE

Nobody ever talks about anything. All I hear is "how's your mother, mine too, I love your dress." Every time I try to raise a topic, everyone shies away from me as if I passed gas.

SHE

What did you want to talk about?

HE

I don't care, the death penalty, the politics of Aids, anything besides ornamental shrubs. The only time anything sincere is said is when we're standing in the doorway on our way out. Then we can't exchange enough information, but that's just because we're all relieved we're going home.

SHE

I didn't know you were interested in the politics of AIDS.

HE

Of course I am, I'm an informed citizen.

SHE

What is the politics of AIDS?

HE

Are. What are the politics of AIDS.

SHE

Is. So what are they?

HE

Believe me, it's nothing you want to talk about.

SHE

I saw you chatting with Richard for a full hour at the last party. You looked absolutely engrossed, you never left the spot.

HE

I was comatose. I was so bored I screwed my toes into the floor.

SHE

What were you talking about?

HE

Curling.

SHE

Curling? With the ice and the broom? What do you know about curling?

HE

Nothing. I was faking it.

SHE

Why?

HE

A man can never admit to an ignorance of sport. Might as well wear a dress.

SHE

Why didn't you change the subject?

HE

If we didn't talk about sports, we wouldn't be able to talk at all. And that was Roger I was talking to, not Richard.

SHE

I thought it was Richard.

HE

Richard doesn't know anything about curling, he's into shooting.

SHE

I thought that was Roger.

HE

How little you know.

SHE

If you're so bored talking to men, why don't you join the women? We have interesting conversations.

HE

Women don't have conversations, they just sit around and agree with each other. "Oh, I know, I know, I know." Conversation requires a difference of opinion.

SHE

You're thinking of debate. If you men would stop competing you might enjoy talking to

SHE (cont'd)

each other. Being sympathetic is how you learn things.

HE

I've heard your so-called meaningful conversations with Marian. "What did you wear and what did you wear and what did he say and what did she say?"

SHE

That's when men are around. We talk about other things when you're not there.

HE

Like what?

SHE

We talk about men.

HE

Really? What do you say about us?

SHE

Anything. Everything. Whatever we feel. We talk about our fantasies for one thing.

HE

You're kidding. Really?

SHE

Really.

HE

What's Marian's fantasy?

SHE

Sex with a hairless man.

HE

What?

SHE

Do you think that's latently homosexual?

HE

That lets out Murray. He's hairy as a werewolf.

SHE

And you. I told her you have hair on your back.

HE

Why did you tell her that, for Christ's sake?

SHE

Because we were talking.

HE

Don't you think that's just a little bit personal?

SHE

That's the point of intimate conversation.

HE

It's supposed to be personal about you, not me. I would no more talk about you like that--they could pull my tongue out first--I can't believe you discuss us that way.

SHE

Oh, men don't talk about us, I suppose.

HE

The only time I ever mentioned you to Murray I complained that you were always late. He said, "Women." End of conversation. Does that classify as intimate?

SHE

I'm not always late.

HE

What else did you tell her about me?

SHE

I forget.

HE

Women never forget anything. Did you tell her anything else about...my body?

SHE

We're not really as concerned about that part of you as you men think.

HE

Yeah? You don't...compare?

SHE

We notice, but it's not an obsession. Marian said Murray hasn't made love to her in three months.

HE

She told you that?

SHE

I'm her friend, who else should she tell?

HE

She might start with Murray.

SHE

Don't you think he knows? Besides, she can't talk to Murray.

HE

(Gleefully) Is he impotent? That's great!

SHE

She's afraid he just isn't attracted to her anymore.

HE

Why wouldn't he be? Marian's a damned attractive woman.

SHE

I thought you didn't like her.

HE

Marian? Of course I like her. And I feel sorry for her, married to Murray. She deserves someone who would appreciate her.

SHE

Who did you have in mind?

HE

So old Murray's impotent. (laughs) Oh, that bag of wind. No wonder he's so aggressive everywhere else.

SHE

Lots of men your age have episodes of impotence.

HE

Well, episodes, sure, episodes. That's perfectly normal, nothing wrong with that, perfectly normal, doesn't mean a thing. Now and then. Once in a while.

SHE

Sometimes.

HE

Occasionally. A guy doesn't always feel like it. But not three months. We're not like women.

SHE

What do you mean, you're not like women?

HE

Well, we've got the stronger sex drive. We may not always be up to it, because, let's face it, more is required of a man, but we're always thinking about it, we're psychologically prepared.

SHE

I think about sex all the time, so does Marian. So do most of the women I know.

HE

No. That's not true.

SHE

At home, in the car, at work, at the supermarket.

HE

You never told me that. Women? You're kidding.

SHE

Only a little.

HE

Who do you think about having it with?

SHE

Various men.

HE

Stop.

SHE

The produce man at Stop and Shop. Dudley Moore. Murray's accountant with the sad eyes.

HE

He's gay.

SHE

Until he meets me.

HE

I get it. You're talking about swooning and candle light dinners and nursing an invalid back to health and all those romance novel things.

SHE

I'm talking about if-he-says-fuck-I'll-beat-him-to-the-floor kind of sex.

HE

I'm stunned. I had no idea it was so important to you.

SHE

I know.

HE

Why didn't you ever tell me this?

SHE

It's not something we talk about. I assumed you knew.

HE

How would I know that? I thought women had to be wooed into having sex.

SHE

Into having sex, maybe, not into thinking about it.

HE

What...I'm afraid to ask this now. When you and Marian swapped fantasies--what was your fantasy?

SHE

To have sex with a man who puts his arm around me.

HE

Are you getting at me for something? Because of that remark about the 25-year-old? That was a joke!

SHE

You said she was 24. Or do you know more than one blonde with legs so long they'll wrap around you twice?

HE

I don't remember what I said. It wasn't important.

SHE

I do. It was...But apparently sex is more important to me than to you.

HE

It hasn't been that long.

SHE

Four weeks.

HE

It hasn't been four weeks. Maybe a week. Ten days, tops. I had a cold, I didn't want to infect you.

SHE

The cold was three weeks ago.

HE

I need recovery time...If you wanted it so bad, you have to let me know.

SHE

Last night, I touched you when you were brushing your teeth.

HE

I thought you were just trying to get past.

SHE

Then when you were reading in bed, I tickled your arm.

HE

Yeah, but you weren't wearing your purple number. You had on the torn flannel and the white socks so I thought you were just trying to annoy me.

SHE

Sometimes I think you don't like me at all.

HE

Come on, I'll show you how much I like you.

SHE

Sure, now, when we don't have any time.

HE

We've got all night. We won't go to the party. I don't need a social life. I've got you.

SHE

But what have I got?... I have to have other people in my life. I'm not like you. I don't know how you men do it.

HE

Do what?

SHE

Live without friends.

HE

I have friends. I have plenty of friends.

SHE

Who?

HE

You want me to name them?

SHE

That way I'll know who they are.

HE

Sten.

SHE

You work with Sten.

HE

So? He's a work friend. How about Greg?

SHE

You play golf with Greg.

HE

He's a golf friend. That doesn't mean he's not my friend.

SHE

What do you talk to him about?

HE

Golf...and other things.

SHE

What are the names of his children?

HE

Huey, Dewey and Louie. I don't know. That's not what we talk about.

SHE

You don't have friends, you have categories.

HE

...Murray. Murray's my friend. All purpose.

SHE

You just said Murray was a son-of-a-bitch.

HE

I don't happen to want to spend time with him, but Murray and I go way back.

SHE

You only see him because he's married to my friend, Marian. Do you have any friends you talk to? That's the measure of a friend, isn't it?

HE

I have friends I don't have to talk to. That's the measure of a friend.

SHE

The difference being, it's very difficult to tell your kind of friend from a stranger.

HE

I'll tell you what a friend is. If you're climbing a mountain and hanging by a rope, who do you want on the other end of that rope? How many friends to you have you can rely on like that?

SHE

So few, since I left the Alps.

HE

A friend is someone you can count on in extremis. You may never see him, you may never talk to him, you might lose all communication, not even know where he lives or if he's still alive, but if you need him, he'll be there.

SHE

Sort of like Tinkerbell? Do you have anyone you talk to intimately?

HE

Oh, the big buzz word. What do you mean by 'intimately'?

SHE

Something beyond "Don't let go of the rope!"

HE

(Thinks) You mean recently?

SHE

Tell me one friend you've had a real talk with in the past year.

HE

(Pause; sadly) God, this is depressing. You're right. I don't have a real friend in the world. And I'm a popular guy. I don't know what went wrong. I used to have friends. When I was in high school and college I had lots of buddies, and we didn't just drink beer together, either. We would talk, god, we could talk about anything and everything. What happened? Why can't I talk to men like that anymore? How come you still get to have friends and I don't? It isn't fair.

SHE

I'm sorry...

HE

It's your fault, you know. I know what happened, I got married, I entered the world of women. That's the end of friends. Married men aren't allowed to have friends. Gay guys have friends.

HE (cont'd)

Single guys have friends. Look at the men in the beer commercials. They have pals and confidants all over the bar. Even the bartender's a chum. Married men don't have friends because they're at home with their wives. You made me a parent, a homeowner, a keeper of schedules. You turned me from one of the guys with buddies into a responsible citizen. That's a hell of a thing to do to a man. Men and women should never marry. We have no training for it. We start segregating from each other in the second grade, by natural preference. Why all of a sudden do we end up together? We have nothing in common. We don't even speak the same language.

SHE

It's the same language. Some of us just aren't listening. I'm going to the party.

HE

Oh, sure, leave me here without a friend in the world.

SHE

I'm going to go have superficial conversations and smile a lot and have a wonderful time.

HE

What the hell am I supposed to do?

SHE

Practice coiling your rope, I guess, I'm going to be with my friends.

She starts to cross, stops at window.

SHE (Cont'd)

What are they doing now?

HE

Digging a moat?

SHE

The gardener has something in a big garbage bag. He's putting it in the hole.

HE

(crosses to window) That's a hemlock.

SHE

It's a yew, actually. But he put the bag in first.

HE

Fertilizer.

SHE

Maybe, but he didn't open the bag.

They stand and stare out the window for a moment.

SHE

Are they a happy couple, do you think?

He puts his arm around her.

HE

We're a happy couple. (No response from her)
If you're going to the party to be with your
friends, I guess I'll go and be with my
friend.

SHE

Who's that?

HE

I've only got one.

SHE

I know.

HE

You're my best friend in the whole world.

SHE

I know.

HE

(Cajoling) And who's your best friend, huh,
who is he?

SHE

(pause) Marian.

LIGHTS FADE SLOWLY as they continue to stare out the window.

CURTAIN

THE END