

NORMA (*Gathering up MIMSEY's train as they move toward the living room*) Roy, don't start in.

ROY What kind of a person is that to let your daughter marry?

(*They stop above the sofa. MIMSEY takes her bridal bouquet from the table behind the sofa, while NORMA puts on her wrap and takes her gloves from the back of the sofa*)

NORMA Roy, don't aggravate me. I'm warning you, don't spoil this day for me.

ROY Kids today don't care. Not like they did in my day.

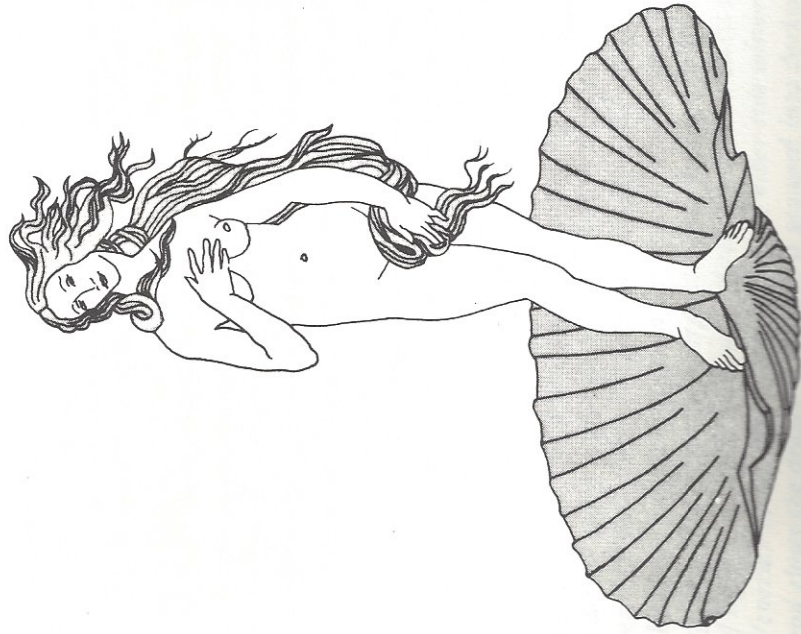
NORMA Walk. Will you walk? In five minutes he'll marry one of the flower girls. Will you walk—

(*MIMSEY takes ROY by the arm and they move to the door, as NORMA follows*)

ROY (*Turning back to NORMA*) Crazy. I must be out of my mind, a boy like that. (*Opens the door*) She was better off in the bathroom. You hear me? Better off in the bathroom . . . (*They are out the door . . .*)

*Curtain*

# Last of the RED HOT Lovers



# Act One

## SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action takes place in an apartment in New York<sup>4</sup> East Thirties.

ACT I: A late afternoon in December.

ACT II: A late afternoon in August.

ACT III: A late afternoon in September.

The scene is a one-and-a-half-room apartment in the Turtle Bay section of Manhattan. It's a new building, not more than five or six years old. At first glance we can see the incongruity of the apartment and its furnishings. The room has a built-in air conditioner, modern parquet floors and the sleek, trim lines of modern-day apartments. The furniture, however, is another story. The pieces are all about thirty years old; good stuff, extremely well taken care of, but clearly from another generation. Pictures abound of family, children and grandchildren. An older person obviously lives here and, probably, judging from the size of the apartment, alone.

The room is empty. The doorbell is ringing as the curtain rises. There is a pause, then a key is heard in the lock, and the door opens. BARNEY CASHMAN sticks in his head and calls out.

BARNEY Hello? . . . Mom? . . . (There is no answer, so he quickly enters the apartment and closes the door. BARNEY CASHMAN is forty-seven years old, neatly dressed in blue suit, blue topcoat and gray felt hat. After removing the key from the lock, he places it on the shelf by the door. He carries an attaché case with him, which he puts down immediately on the floor. He takes the rubbers off his shoes, spreads out a newspaper he is carrying, puts it in a corner of the room and puts his rubbers on the newspaper. He removes his hat and coat and puts them neatly in the closet, which contains a fur coat and other feminine apparel. He crosses to a large window, trying to stay out of sight as much as possible, and reaches out and closes the Venetian blind. He then moves to the other two windows and closes the drapes. The room is plunged into darkness despite the fact that outside is a bright December afternoon. He then goes to the light switch by the front door and touches it to turn on all the lamps in the room. He

picks up the attaché case and crosses to the dining table to open it. He takes out a bottle of J&B Scotch and places it on the table. He then takes out a Bloomingdale's bag, removes one tissue-wrapped glass, unwraps it and puts it on the table. Then he takes out a bottle of aftershave lotion, opens it, and administers it to his face lavishly. He rubs his fingers vigorously with lotion and smells them. He goes to the sofa, checks his watch, slides the coffee table to one side, throws the sofa cushions over the back and pulls out the convertible bed. He looks at his watch again, closes the bed, replaces the cushions, and slides the coffee table back into place. He returns to the dining table and pours himself a drink, which he carries to the telephone. He dials the phone, puts the receiver on the desk and takes a drink, winning. He then quickly picks up the receiver, presumably just as the other party has come on. Into the phone, hardly above a whisper) Hello? . . . Harriet? . . . Mr. Cashman . . . Everything all right? . . . Did Pepito come in? . . . Pepito, the busboy . . . All right, Pietro—whatever his name is . . . Didn't come in, heh? . . . Did you try the agency again? . . . Well, listen, there's nothing I can do right now—(Looks at his watch)—I'll be in about five o'clock . . . I'm still in Bloomingdale's. It's just murder in here with all the Christmas shoppers . . . Did my wife call? And you told her Bloomingdale's? . . . Good. Good . . . Listen, I gotta run. I see an opening on the escalator . . . I'll be back at five-thirty the latest . . . Thank you, Harriet. (He bangs up the phone; thinks for a second) What the hell am I doing here? (He quickly goes to the closet. The doorbell rings. He freezes, looking around for an exit. There is, of course, none. He rushes to the door and peers out the minuscule peephole. Satisfied, he opens the door.

ELAINE NAVAZIO enters. She is in her late thirties, somewhat attractive, and modestly dressed. There is an air of desperation about ELAINE. BARNEY looks at her nervously) Hello. (ELAINE smiles and nods) I was in the kitchen. I didn't hear the bell. (ELAINE walks past him into the apartment) Come on in.  
(He closes the door)

ELAINE (Turns; looks at him) I'm in.

BARNEY How are you?

ELAINE Very nice.

BARNEY Well, you look very nice.

ELAINE You look surprised. Didn't you think I'd come?

BARNEY I wasn't sure . . . but I was hoping.

ELAINE I wasn't sure either . . . but I came. 587

BARNEY I'm glad.

ELAINE (Smiles) Good.

BARNEY I'd have been disappointed if you didn't come . . . Would you?

ELAINE Be disappointed if I didn't come? No, I'd know I wasn't coming, so there'd be no disappointment.

BARNEY Anyway, hello . . . My God, I'm sorry. I forgot your name.

ELAINE (With sincerity) You're forgiven. Elaine Navazio.

BARNEY Really?

ELAINE Don't tell me I'm wrong?

BARNEY You just don't look like an Elaine Navazio to me.

ELAINE No? What then?

BARNEY I don't know. For some reason you looked like an Irene to me.

ELAINE Irene? You think I look like an Irene? (She turns and looks at the wall mirror) No, I look like an Elaine Navazio.

(She continues examining the apartment)

BARNEY Are you of Italian origin? Navazio?

ELAINE No, I'm of Polish persuasion. Mr. Navazio is of Italian origin. What extraction are you of?

BARNEY Actually I'm part Russian and part Lithuanian. My real name isn't Cashman. It's Czernivekoski. When my grandfather came to this country someone told him if he has any trouble with

the immigration office at Ellis Island he should give the *man* some *cash*. So when they asked my grandfather his name and they couldn't understand him, he gave the *man* some *cash*. So that's the name they gave him. Cashman.

ELAINE (*Looks at him*) That's an extremely interesting story.

BARNEY I'm sorry. I was just making conversation. (*She passes the kitchen*) That's the kitchen.

ELAINE (*Nods*) No bedroom?

BARNEY No. Well, the sofa opens into a bed. It's a convertible.

ELAINE (*Not much enthusiasm*) Yippee! (*She turns and stares at BARNEY. He doesn't quite know what to do, so he looks around awkwardly. Then, after a few moments*) You like it quiet like this? I mean, no talking?

BARNEY I'm sorry. I guess I just ran out of conversation for a minute.

ELAINE Are you nervous?

BARNEY The truth? . . . Yes. Are you?

ELAINE (*Smiles*) The truth? . . . No.

(*She turns and examines the room again*)

BARNEY Good. No sense in *both* of us being nervous. You mentioned Mr. Navazio. So I assume you're married.

ELAINE Mr. Navazio assumes I'm married. I assume what I want.

BARNEY I didn't see a marriage ring so I was wond—  
(*ELAINE interrupts by turning her head away and coughing. It's a small cough at first. She tries to suppress it to no avail. All at once she is having a coughing spasm, coughing violently and uncontrollably. She holds on to the desk chair for support as the fit finally subsides. She sits there gasping for air. Then, to BARNEY*)

ELAINE Can I have a cigarette?

BARNEY A cigarette? Wouldn't you rather have some water?

ELAINE I can't smoke water.  
(*She pants heavily*)

BARNEY You're not sick, are you?

ELAINE In what way?

BARNEY In a sick way. I mean, that's a terrible cough.

ELAINE If it bothers you, I won't do it again.

BARNEY It doesn't bother *me*. I thought it would bother you.

ELAINE If it bothered me, I wouldn't do it, would I?  
. . . You're not going to give me that cigarette, are you?

(*BARNEY feels pointlessly in his pockets, as though to prove he doesn't carry them*)

BARNEY I don't smoke.

ELAINE Then what are you feeling your pockets for?

BARNEY I don't know. It was just a reflex action.

ELAINE You mean you always feel your pockets when you don't offer someone a cigarette?

BARNEY No. I don't know why I did it.

ELAINE You don't keep any in the apartment?

BARNEY It's not my apartment.

ELAINE I see. (*She takes a deep breath and regains her composure*) You just borrow it once in a while.

BARNEY No, nothing like that. As a matter of fact, it's my mother's apartment.

ELAINE You're not actively serious?

BARNEY I am. I'm very serious. It's my mother's apartment. This is where my mother lives.

ELAINE Is she gonna join us?

BARNEY She works two days a week for Mount Sinai Hospital. She doesn't get home until five.

ELAINE Well, that'll make things interesting.

BARNEY My mother is always doing charity work. She likes to help out needy people.

ELAINE Like us.

BARNEY (*Sbrugs*) I didn't know where else to come.

ELAINE Listen, I always say, Keep it in the family.

BARNEY Er . . . Would you like a drink?

ELAINE Desperately.

BARNEY (*He crosses to his attaché case*) I'm sorry. I should have offered you one right away. I have J&B Scotch. Is that all right?

ELAINE (*Opens her coat*) What else have you got?

BARNEY That's it. Just J&B Scotch.

ELAINE I'll have a J&B Scotch.

BARNEY I never noticed you drink at the restaurant, so I figured a plain Scotch . . .

(*He takes a glass out of the paper bag*)

ELAINE You brought glasses too?

BARNEY I picked them up in Bloomingdale's. I was thinking of getting them for the restaurant.

ELAINE You were afraid if you dirtied your mother's glasses she'd know someone was here.

BARNEY (*Caught, he smiles*) Well, she's a very meticulous woman. And if anything looked different when she came home I'd have to explain to her and it would get very complicated.

ELAINE I think you did the smart thing. How many ice cubes did you bring?

BARNEY (*Smiles*) Well, I didn't go quite that far. Why, would you like some ice? I'll get some ice for you.

ELAINE Forget it. We'd spend the rest of the afternoon wiping fingerprints off the tray.

(*BARNEY pours the Scotch into ELAINE'S glass.*  
ELAINE *watches him*)

BARNEY (*Pouring*) My mother's very typical, you know. She remembers exactly how high the pillows were puffed when she left.

ELAINE Is that why you put your rubbers on the newspaper? So it wouldn't leave telltale slush?

BARNEY I'm beginning to feel very foolish about all this.

ELAINE Forget it. Meeting on the sly is not without its drawbacks.

BARNEY (*Hands her the drink*) Well, here you are.

ELAINE (*Takes it*) I would like to ask you one question though.

BARNEY Yes?

ELAINE Are you going to talk soft like that all afternoon?

BARNEY Was I talking soft?

ELAINE I know that's not your natural voice because I hear you yelling a lot in the restaurant—“*The lady wants boiled balibut not baked balibut!*” Are you talking soft because you think that's sexier? Because I don't find it sexy. I find it hard to hear.

BARNEY I'm sorry. It's just that these new buildings have paper-thin walls and, you know, I was afraid—I mean my mother has this high squeaky voice and there's this old lady next door who's home all day, and if she were to hear deep voices she'd start to wonder—

ELAINE So what's the plan? You whisper and I clean the house in a high squeaky voice?

BARNEY No, no. There's no plan. We'll both talk natural.

ELAINE You got a pencil and paper? We could pass notes.

BARNEY I didn't mean to inhibit you. (*Talks louder*)  
Look. I'm talking loud and clear in my natural  
voice. Is that better? Does that make you feel more  
comfortable?

ELAINE (*Smiles, nods*) Much.

BARNEY I really feel like an idiot. I want you to relax  
and say anything and do anything you want. (*He  
smiles*) Okay?

ELAINE Do you know you have a nice smile?

BARNEY (*Slightly embarrassed*) Me? No!

ELAINE That's not your smile? It looked like your  
smile.

BARNEY Well, thank you.

ELAINE Don't thank me. It's your smile.

BARNEY I never know when you're kidding me.

ELAINE (*With sincerity*) I was just kidding you. Don't  
pay attention to me.

BARNEY Anyway, you're not supposed to say nice  
things to me, I'm supposed to say nice things to you.

ELAINE All right. Say nice things to me.

BARNEY (*Looks at her*) You're an attractive woman.

ELAINE That's it? You came off better than I did.  
Cheers.

BARNEY Cheers!

(*They both drink. She, a healthy slug; he, just a sip  
and he winces*)

ELAINE Is that your wife I see once in a while in the  
restaurant? The tall blond woman with the mink coat  
and the space shoes?

BARNEY That's right. How did you know?

ELAINE I figured the only person who'd come in and  
take money out of the cash register and leave without  
saying a word is either a mute crook or a wife.

BARNEY She does that once a week. She goes to the  
bank on Fridays.

ELAINE (*Nods*) How long are you and the depositor  
married?

BARNEY (*Sbrugs*) A long time.

ELAINE How long? Five years? Ten years? What?

BARNEY Twenty-three years.

ELAINE (*Nods*) Oh. Professionals . . . So here it is Fri-  
day, and your wife's at the bank with her space shoes,  
and your mother's rolling bandages at Mount Sinai  
. . . and you are all alone with an attractive woman  
with an empty glass.

BARNEY (*Takes it*) Oh, I'm sorry. (*He goes back to the  
bottle. He surreptitiously smells his fingers and then  
starts to pour Scotch into her glass*) You sure you don't  
want ice?

ELAINE Positive. You just did it again.

BARNEY Did what?

ELAINE Smelled your fingers. That's the third time you  
smelled your fingers since I'm here.

BARNEY Did I do that? I wasn't even conscious of it.

ELAINE Is that an occupational hazard? Owning a fish  
restaurant and always worrying how your fingers  
smell?

BARNEY Well, it's opening those clams and oysters. I  
enjoy doing it. I do about eight dozen every morning.  
That's for the last twenty years. I use soap, perfume,  
aftershave lotion, turpentine . . . They're all right for  
a few hours, then about four in the afternoon—it  
comes back in just like the tide.

ELAINE I wouldn't worry about it if I were you.

BARNEY Well, it's not the suavest thing in the world. I  
mean sitting here in a nice blue suit with an attractive  
woman, smelling my fingers.

ELAINE The smelly fingers don't bother me as much as the blue suit. You never wear anything else, do you?

BARNEY Not in the restaurant. My father always taught me, a business man should always wear a dignified blue suit. I wear them in the summer, too, only in a cooler fabric.

ELAINE Good. I was concerned.

BARNEY What do they call a person like me? A creature of habit?

ELAINE Yes, I think that's what they call a person like you. Didn't you ever have a wild, crazy desire for a brown sports jacket?

BARNEY I have sports jackets in my closet at home. I have a brown sports jacket and a gray checked sports jacket . . .

ELAINE Is that where you wear them? In your closet at home?

BARNEY I wear them all the time. I'm not as staid as you think.

ELAINE Yes, you are. Staid is a very staid word. You own a car?

BARNEY Yes.

ELAINE A Buick, right?

BARNEY My God, how did you know?

ELAINE (*Shrugs*) It goes with blue suits.

BARNEY You're a very unusual woman, Elaine. Like the way you came to my restaurant. I've never seen you there before and suddenly you come back for lunch eight days in a row. What is it, a special high-protein diet?

ELAINE I get cravings.

BARNEY You mean to eat?

ELAINE To eat, to touch, to smell, to see, to do . . . A

sensual, physical pleasure that can only be satisfied at *that* particular moment.

BARNEY You mean like after an hour of handball, a cold Pepsi?

ELAINE (*She looks at him*) I'm going to have trouble with you, right? . . . I have a craving for another Scotch. 595

BARNEY Coming right up.

(*He takes her glass and starts to go over to the bottle, when his hand passes in front of his face*)

ELAINE (*Chidingly*) Eh, eh. Caught you again.

BARNEY I wasn't smelling my fingers. I was looking at my watch.

ELAINE Oh. Is it time to smell your fingers yet?

BARNEY I was just thinking about my mother. We have plenty of time.

ELAINE What time is it?

BARNEY Ten after three.

ELAINE And Mount Sinai lets out at five. We've got an hour and fifty minutes. Okay, you want to make the first move?

BARNEY Boy, you're very *open* about things, aren't you?

ELAINE In other words, you're not going to make the first move.

BARNEY Sure I am. Certainly. I just thought we'd finish our drink.

ELAINE (*Shrugs*) It's your schedule. Listen, you think there's a chance the little old lady next door smokes? All I need is one cigarette.

BARNEY I wouldn't think so.

ELAINE I could ring her bell. I could say I'm collecting for the Red Cross.

BARNEY I'm sorry I didn't bring any. You don't think you could wait until five o'clock?

ELAINE I could wait until August if you were a hypnotist. Forget it, I'll take shorter breaths.

BARNEY Can I say something? . . . This isn't going very well, is it?

ELAINE It's had its ups and downs.

BARNEY You know, Mrs. Navazio, you really are . . .

ELAINE If you're going to keep calling me Mrs. Navazio, you'd better get out a deck of cards.

BARNEY I'm sorry . . . Irene.

ELAINE Try Elaine. You'll get a better response.

BARNEY Elaine. Why do I think you're Irene?

ELAINE Is your wife Irene?

BARNEY No, my wife is Thelma.

ELAINE Well, let *her* worry about Irene.

BARNEY The thing is, Elaine—

ELAINE Yes, Barney?

BARNEY Barney. That's right. Please call me Barney.

ELAINE What else have I got to do?

BARNEY The thing is, Elaine —

ELAINE Yes, Barney?

BARNEY The thing is—I find you an extremely attractive woman.

ELAINE I heard. Thank you.

BARNEY I know, I said it before. And I said it in the restaurant, didn't I? Wasn't it the first thing I said to you?

ELAINE No. The first thing you said to me was "Try the scallops."

BARNEY I mean after I got to know you. Once we got to talking. On a personal basis.

ELAINE The first *personal* thing you said to me was "I have never seen such beautiful fingers in my finger bowls."

BARNEY Well, listen, I'm not George Bernard Shaw. For me, I thought it was clever. . . . It was corny, right?

ELAINE I'm not in George Bernard Shaw's mother's apartment, am I? 597

BARNEY Not that I don't dabble a little in writing myself. LAST OF THE

RED HOT

LOVERS

ELAINE Oh? You dabble?

BARNEY Nothing serious, but I get a kick out of it. You read some of my stuff.

ELAINE I did? Where?

BARNEY In the menu. "Sweet savory swordfish steak swimming in salivary succulence." That's mine.

ELAINE Very catchy. It has a nice beat.

BARNEY That's the idea. It's what they call alliteration.

ELAINE Do they? You take that in college?

BARNEY I didn't go to college. I went from the army right into the "Queen of the Sea." My father started the restaurant in 1931. We used to be in Sheephead Bay. That's where I grew up. I was always hoping to be a radio writer. Orson Welles and the Mercury Theater, that was my dream. But then came the war, and then my father died and left me the restaurant, and then television killed radio. And I never thought my kind of writing would go on television. I don't write visual. I write for the ear. "Sweet succulent savory swordfish steak" . . . Anyway, I still get a kick out of doing the menus. Did you see the one I did on Flaming Florentine Flounder?

ELAINE I browsed through it . . . What time is it now?

BARNEY (*Looks at his watch*) Twenty after three.

ELAINE That's another ten minutes shot. So what's it going to be?



BARNEY My God, you really come right to the point, don't you?

ELAINE Look, did you ask me to come up here with the intentions of having an affair or not?

BARNEY Well, in a manner of speaking—

ELAINE Yes or no?

BARNEY (*A pause*) Yes.

ELAINE And that we've got to be out by five?

BARNEY I don't think I put it that bluntly.

ELAINE What time do we have to be out?

BARNEY (*Sbrugs*) Five.

ELAINE (*Has made her point*) All right?

BARNEY Look, I don't deny my intentions were of a romantic nature—

ELAINE *Romantic*? In your mother's clean apartment with two glasses from Bloomingdale's and your rubbers dripping on the newspaper?

BARNEY It was my belief that romance is inspired by the participants and not the accouterments.

ELAINE That's beautifully worded. You ought to use it on the Cherrystone Clams. What's the matter, is "having an affair" a dirty expression?

BARNEY Certainly not. "Having an affair." What's wrong with that?

ELAINE I mean people talk that way today, you know. Maybe not Buick drivers, but a lot of people I know.

BARNEY I admitted I was a creature of habit, not a prude.

ELAINE The hell you're not. I bet I could say three words right now that would turn your blue suit into a glen plaid.

BARNEY Look, Elaine, this is really silly . . .

ELAINE I'm gonna say it. I'm going to say a word now. You want to put your hands over your ears?

BARNEY Hey, come on, Elaine, I don't think this is funny . . .

ELAINE I'm saying it . . . Screw!

BARNEY (*Looks at her*) Asshole! I can do it too. I don't understand the point of this.

ELAINE The point is we've got a time problem and you're reading me fish poetry.

BARNEY I realize we have a time problem but there's also the business of human communication. Of talking to someone, getting to know someone . . . I'm sorry, maybe my whole approach to you is a little too old-fashioned.

ELAINE (*Throws up her hands*) Okay. All right. I'm flexible. I'll try things your way . . . What did you want to see me about, Mr. Cashman?

BARNEY Ohh, Elaine, don't be like that.

ELAINE Well, maybe I just don't understand you. I've got a two-hundred-and-ten-pound husband who'd break my arms and legs if he caught me up here and you're telling me about your sweet succulent childhood in Sheepshead Bay.

BARNEY I just thought you might be interested in knowing a little bit more about me. I mean until you walked in here ten minutes ago—

ELAINE *Twenty minutes ago—*

BARNEY Twenty minutes ago, I was just a restaurant owner who admired your fingers and you were an attractive woman who has a craving for fish.

ELAINE Look, *you* were the one who wrote down an address and apartment number on the back of a dollar-eighty check. Then I come here and find out we've got an hour and fifty minutes before your social-working mother with the high squeaky voice comes home to examine the puffed pillows. Now, if we had two weeks in Nassau I'd gladly look at color pictures of your tonsils—

BARNEY I explained that. I thought a motel was a little sordid . . . And I would gladly have picked up your check but my cashier's very nosy and if she saw me paying for some woman—

ELAINE Forget it. You got a lot of courage. I was surprised you took a chance giving me an extra shrimp in the shrimp cocktail.

(*She finishes her drink*)

BARNEY I don't know how we got started on this—

ELAINE It's cigarette nerves, pay no attention. (*Indicating the Scotch*) Is that bottle just going to sit up there or are you going to turn it into a lamp?

BARNEY You finished the other one already?

ELAINE I didn't finish it, it evaporated.

BARNEY Elaine . . . Can I ask you a very honest question?

ELAINE Yes, I've done this before.

BARNEY (*Looks at her*) That wasn't what I was going to ask.

ELAINE All right, you got one for free. What were you going to ask?

BARNEY I'm still not over that answer. You mean you have—on other occasions—?

ELAINE I have on other occasions—in other places—with other men—done the unthinkable. If it'll help your vanity any, you are the first owner of a fish restaurant I've ever been with. In that respect, I'm still a virgin.

BARNEY I gather then you're not very happy with Mr. Navazio?

ELAINE What the hell kind of a question is that, am I happy with Mr. Navazio?

BARNEY I'm sorry. It's none of my business.

ELAINE I didn't come up here to get reformed. It's bad enough you got me to quit smoking; leave my sex life alone.

BARNEY I drop the subject.

ELAINE What was your question?

BARNEY What question? Oh, before . . . Well, I was just wondering, I mean, I told you I thought you were attractive . . . I know why I asked you to come here. Did you come because . . . er . . . Isn't it funny? I find it hard to just come out and say it.

ELAINE Would you like me to wait in the kitchen?

BARNEY Am I appealing to you?

ELAINE Yes.

BARNEY I am?

ELAINE *Now* you appeal to me.

BARNEY What do you mean, now? Do you mean possibly not tomorrow?

ELAINE I mean possibly not in fifteen minutes. I have a short span of concentration.

BARNEY You mean with you it can change from day to day?

ELAINE By tonight I may hate filet of sole.

BARNEY I'm not talking about sea food. I'm talking about people.

ELAINE Yes, with me it can change from day to day.

BARNEY Oh, Well, I find that disturbing.

ELAINE (*An edge of sarcasm*) Do you really?

BARNEY Yes, I do. I find it disturbing, and a little sad, that your attitude towards people is so detached.

ELAINE You'll get over it. Can I ask you a question?

BARNEY Yes?

ELAINE Are you writing some kind of research book? Is that really why you got me up here? *Sexual Secrets of Seafood Sufferers?* You got a little tape recorder going on in the candy dish?

(*She leans over and lifts the top of the candy dish*)

BARNEY I'm sorry, it's very hard keeping up with you. One minute we're having a nice conversation, and the next minute you turn on me.

ELAINE Listen, it's really been terrific, Mr. Cashman. I don't know when I've had a better time. You certainly pour a beautiful glass of Scotch and my compliments to your mother's housekeeping.

BARNEY Where are you going?

ELAINE Outside to look for cigarette butts. And then home. Don't worry, no one will notice me leaving the building. I'll walk out backwards.

BARNEY What did I say? Why are you so upset?

ELAINE I disturb you? I make you sad? I have been called a lot of things by a lot of people in a lot of places but I have never been called a depressant.

(*She starts for the door*)

BARNEY I didn't say that. I didn't even mean that.

ELAINE You got some nerve getting me up here in a 1938 furnished apartment in your shiny blue suit and your thimbleful of Scotch, sitting there smelling your fingers and telling me I give you the blues.

BARNEY When did I say that? I'm not depressed. I'm not blue. I'm very happy.

ELAINE No kidding? How about two fast choruses of "Let a Smile Be Your Umbrella"? . . . Look, let me have a dollar-fifty. I'll be goddamned if I'm going to pay for the lunch and the taxi.

BARNEY Elaine . . . Elaine, please . . . please sit down. Let me just say something.

ELAINE Say something? You've already talked away half our allotted time. Now you'll have to use the other half to wipe my lip prints off the glass, puff the pillows, and get the hell out of here.

BARNEY (*Softly*) Elaine, if you could just lower your voice a little—

ELAINE (*Screams*) LOWER MY VOICE?

BARNEY Shhh . . .

ELAINE (*Crosses to the wall and yells at it*) Mr. Cashman is using his mother's apartment to bring broads!

BARNEY What's the sense in that?

ELAINE Don't tell me I depress you! "Flaming Florentine Flounder"—Holy Christ!

BARNEY Elaine, you're getting yourself unduly upset.

ELAINE Unduly upset? I'm risking a bullet between the eyes and I can't even get a lousy cigarette . . .

(*This starts her coughing. It gradually worsens into the same violent coughing fit as before. As she coughs, she rushes into the bathroom for a glass of water. Her fit gradually subsides and then turns into just heavy, deep breathing. He returns to her side with the water*)

BARNEY Your chest sounds all congested. Have you ever tried sleeping with a vaporizer?

ELAINE No, but don't worry, I'll get around to every-one.

BARNEY I don't want to seem gloomy, but that's a very bad cough. Have you gone to a doctor?

ELAINE There is nothing wrong with my lungs or my chest. I cough because I have nothing better to do in the afternoons.

BARNEY (*Still with the glass in his hand*) Don't you want the water?

ELAINE Keep it as a memento of this wonderful afternoon.

BARNEY Boy, oh boy, I sure bungled this whole thing, didn't I?

ELAINE You want it straight?  
(*She makes a circle sign with three fingers*)

BARNEY I'm sorry. I really am sorry.

ELAINE All right, forget it.

BARNEY No, I am. I really am. I'm sorry I wasted your time. I'm sure you could have found something more interesting to do than sitting here talking to me.

ELAINE If I rush I can still make the second show at the Hayden Planetarium. Don't get wistful, will you, please? I can't stand wistful forty-five-year-old men.

BARNEY Is that how old I look to you? Forty-five?

ELAINE (*She looks at him*) Cut right down to the marrow, heh? No, actually you look like a college kid, twenty-one, twenty-two . . .

BARNEY Aw, come on.

ELAINE It's your black socks with the clocks on them that threw me off.

BARNEY Anyway, I'm flattered, because I'm forty-seven. Does that surprise you?

ELAINE It's a good thing I was sitting when you told me.

BARNEY You're still upset, aren't you? About what I said before.

ELAINE Forget it.

BARNEY No, you're still upset, I can tell.

ELAINE I'm not upset, I'm not angry, I'm not mad. If you want the plain, heart-breaking truth, I'm a little bored. But there was no harm done, no one got hurt. The worst that'll happen is that from now on I'll get the same five shrimps as everyone else. (*She gets up*) It's been a glorious and memorable thirty minutes. Good-bye, Mr. Cashman.

BARNEY Don't go.

ELAINE It happens to the best of us.  
(*She crosses to the door*)

BARNEY Elaine . . . Do you know what I wish?

ELAINE (*Warding him off with her hand*) Don't tell me, it won't come true.  
(*She opens the door*)

BARNEY I wish that you would go out, close the door, then ring the bell and come back in again. I wish we could start this whole thing over, from the beginning.

ELAINE (*Turns at the door, looks at him*) Yeah . . . Well . . . That's life . . . Good-bye, Barney. (*She goes and closes the door. BARNEY shrugs, then goes over to the table and picks up the two glasses. Then he crosses back to his attaché case with the glasses and puts one of them away. The doorbell rings. He looks up, dabs some more after-shave lotion on his fingers and crosses back to the door. He opens it. ELAINE walks into the room, surveys it as if for the first time, then turns and smiles at BARNEY. Sweetly, almost girlish*) I just happened to be in the neighborhood and I thought I'd drop by . . . (*BARNEY looks at her, then wordlessly he moves toward her. ELAINE looks at him expectantly, seeing a new BARNEY, one that she hoped to find in the first place. He is beside her. He pulls her firmly to him and then kisses her—solidly and passionately. Then, still with his lips on her, he tries to maneuver her back toward the couch. ELAINE trips and falls backwards onto the sofa. BARNEY falls on top of her*)  
Oh, Christ!

BARNEY Are you all right?

ELAINE My goddamn lip is bleeding.

BARNEY I'm sorry, Elaine.

ELAINE If you wanted me on the sofa, why didn't you just point to it?

BARNEY I didn't want you on the sofa. I'm very sorry. Let me see your lip.

ELAINE It's a bleeding lip, you've seen them before.

BARNEY Let me put some cold water on it.

ELAINE It's all right, it'll heal. It's only royal families that have to worry. Give me a handkerchief.  
(*He gives her a handkerchief. She dabs*)

BARNEY Damned stupid idiot. I don't know why I kissed you so hard.

ELAINE It was a terrific kiss. A little pointy maybe, but very nice. Help me up.  
(*He pulls her up*)

BARNEY Can I put a little ice on it?

ELAINE Just your worrying about it is enough for me. It stopped. (*Hands him the banky*) Here. You'd better burn this.

(*He takes it*)

BARNEY How about a little more Scotch?

ELAINE How about a lot more? (*He nods, goes back to the attaché case and takes out the glass. She looks at him*) You packed the glasses already? You didn't wax the floors too, did you?

BARNEY (*Pours another drink*) Some klutz, heh? That's me. World's Olympic Champion klutz.

ELAINE Listen, it was the best two minutes we had. I'm not one to knock a little physical contact.

BARNEY Yeah, but I mean it was right out of high school. If we missed the sofa, I could have fallen on top of you and broken your back.

(*He hands her drink*)

ELAINE (*Smiles*) That's an interesting picture. You want to take another shot at it?

BARNEY (*Smiles back*) You mean I'm forgiven? You really are something, Elaine. I never saw anyone who can change moods as quickly as you.

ELAINE It's a talent. It's not as good as tap dancing, but what the hell.

BARNEY I don't think you're as tough as you like to sound.

ELAINE I'll bet you're going to hold my hand next.

BARNEY Yes, I am. How do you like that? (*Holds her hand*) Don't you like having a man hold your hand in his?

ELAINE Well, it depends what he's doing with the other hand.

BARNEY I wish I could figure you out. I wish I knew what was going on in that brain of yours right now

ELAINE We're not going to get on a *talking* thing again, are we? Without cigarettes?

BARNEY Elaine, what were you like when you were a girl?

ELAINE Fat and pimply. Don't you even smoke a pipe? A couple of drags is all I really need.

BARNEY My God, is that all you can think of? Is that the most important thing in your life right now? Is there nothing else on your mind but a lousy god-damned mentholated filtered cigarette?

ELAINE Well, what are you offering that's more enjoyable?

BARNEY I'm trying to talk to you, to know what you're like as a human being. Is there anything wrong with that?

ELAINE Not if we didn't have to be out by five. If you wanted information I could have filled out a form in the restaurant.

BARNEY Tell me the truth—the honest truth. Would you be a lot happier if I started ripping off your clothes and jumping all over you? No hello, no nothing. Just the pure, physical animal act. Is that what you would prefer?

ELAINE Well, it *would* be a way of breaking the ice.

BARNEY Because if that's what you want I certainly could accommodate you. I mean there's no problem in that area, is there?

ELAINE If you say so.

BARNEY I say so. There is *no* problem in that area.

ELAINE Then what *is* the problem?

BARNEY There's *no* problem . . . yes, there is. I'm sorry, I just happen to think that's crude. Look, I admit I don't know you very well, but I was hoping to start off this relationship with at least mutual *respect* for each other . . .

ELAINE If you don't know me how can you respect me?

BARNEY Because you're a human being, a woman. And I respect that.

ELAINE Hey, listen, no offense, but I'm getting a bad headache. How much do you get for a couple of aspirin?

BARNEY I suppose I did that. As you said, I'm boring you to death, right?

ELAINE Barney, you're simply too overconfident for me. I'm just putty in your hands. Can I pour it myself? I promise I won't go past the pencil mark.  
(*She pours a drink*)

BARNEY (*Watches her*) Elaine . . . Is it possible you really are as cold as you sound?

ELAINE I need gloves to take off my underwear.

BARNEY Flippant, wise, cold . . . You won't permit yourself to be sincere and honest for a minute, will you?

ELAINE (*She drinks*) Barney, I'm going to give you one free hint so the afternoon isn't a total write-off. If you want undying love and romance, take a guitar and go to Spain. (*She puts down her glass*) I am leaving for good now. My peak has ebbed.

BARNEY Cold, callous and unemotional.

ELAINE (*Starting for the door*) Those are my attorney's. You know where to get in touch with me.

BARNEY Forgive me for saying so, but it's a pretty frightening way to go through life.

ELAINE (*At the door*) You're forgiven.

BARNEY . . . frightening, sad and pitiful.

(*ELAINE is just about to step out when she stops at this last remark. She stands there for a moment. Then she takes a step back and turns to BARNEY, in a rage*)

ELAINE You hypocrite! You soul-searching, finger-smelling, hypocritical son of a bitch! Who are you to

tell anybody how to go through life? What would you have done if I came in here all fluttery and blushing and "Ooh, Mr. Cashman, don't put your hand there, I'm a married woman"? Were you going to tell me how much you respect me, admire me and, at the moment of truth, even love me? You know damn well tomorrow you'd be back behind that counter opening clams and praying to Christ I'd never come back in your restaurant. And you know something? That's the way it should be. Forgive me for the terrible, sinful thing I'm about to say but I happen to like the pure physical act of making love. It warms me, it stimulates me and it makes me feel like a woman—but that's another ugly story. That's what I came up here for and that's what you were expecting. But don't give me, "When I was nine years old my mother ran off with the butcher and I've been looking for someone to love me ever since." I don't know your problems and I don't care. Keep your savory swordfish succotash stories to yourself. No one really cares about anything or anyone in this world except himself, and there's only one way to get through with your sanity. If you can't taste it, touch it or smell it, forget it! If you want a copy of that speech, send fifty cents and self-addressed envelope—

BARNEY Please don't go yet.

ELAINE It's getting late . . . and I have to feed the lion at six.

BARNEY But I don't want you to leave like this. I want you to hear me out. Stay five more minutes. You can do that, can't you?

ELAINE Don't waste your time. We're incompatible. You need Joan Fontaine and I need a box of lozenges.

(*She opens the door*)

BARNEY (*He goes to the door and closes it*) All right, if I have to lock you in, I'll lock you in. (*He bolts the door*) You saw me opening the clams, you know I'm stronger than you.

ELAINE (*Looks at him; smiles*) Wouldn't you know it? We've only got forty minutes left and finally you show me some brute force.

BARNEY Will you please sit down? I'm asking nicely.

ELAINE You want to really get me crazy? Push me! (*He suddenly grabs her arm, pulls her and shoves her onto a chair. She falls into it, stunned, and looks up at him with great surprise. He is shaking with anger, and points a threatening finger at her*)

BARNEY Just sit there! Don't talk, don't cough, don't even breathe. Just sit there and shut up until I tell you you can go. If I get nothing else from you this afternoon it's going to be your undivided goddamned attention! Excuse me! (*He crosses to the bottle, pours himself a drink, and gulps it down. She looks at him incredulously but silently. He does not look at her*) I'm sure it will come as no great shock to you, but you are the first "attempted" extramarital affair for me in twenty-three years of marriage. I've never even kissed another woman. In twenty-three years. I got married to my high-school sweetheart—and when have you heard that expression last—at the age of twenty-four, having gone steady with her since I was sixteen. And how many experiences with other women do you think I've had prior to getting married? . . . One! I had one shot at it. When I was eighteen my brother took me to an apartment in Newark, New Jersey, where I consorted with a forty-four-year-old woman who greeted me lying naked on a brass bed reading a newspaper. It cost me seven dollars and I threw up all night. I don't smoke, I don't gamble, and you've had more to drink this afternoon than I've had in my whole life. I've never had a car accident, never had a fistfight, never had a broken bone, never had a temperature over a hundred and two . . . Life has not only been very kind to me, it goes out of its way to ignore me . . . I've got three kids I'm very proud of, a house I've worked very hard for and a wife who is not extraordinary, not what you would call an exciting, vivacious woman, but one who is kind, considerate,

devoted and that I happen to love. So why after twenty-three years do I write my mother's address on the back of a check, buy a bottle of Scotch with two glasses and pray to God I never get caught? Why? I'll tell you why . . . I don't know. I've never had the urge before . . . Not true. I started getting the urge about five years ago. Two years ago seriously. About a year ago I decided to give in to it, and the last six months conscientiously. I'm forty-seven years old and for the first time in my life I think about dying. The thought of death has now become a part of my life. I read the obituaries every day just for the satisfaction of not seeing my name there. I constantly think about how it's going to come and how I'm going to bear up to it. Do you know I even practice dying? I lie in bed at night trying to feel myself slipping away . . . and then I let my head drop off to the side . . . and then I let out my last gasp of air . . . then I go in and take two sleeping pills because I'm up the rest of the night scared out of my wits. But it's inevitable, it's going to happen someday, maybe sooner than I think. And I ask myself, "Have you enjoyed it, Barney? Was it a really terrific forty-seven years?" And you know what my answer is? "Well, I wouldn't say terrific. It was nice." . . . The sum total of my existence is nice. I will go to my grave having led a nice life. And I will have a nice funeral and they will bury me in my nice blue suit. And my wife will weep for me and mourn for me and in six months she will marry another nice fellow . . . maybe even give him my brown sports jacket. And I wouldn't condemn her for it. It's the natural order of things. Life must go on . . . But while it's going on, shouldn't it be better than just "nice"? Shouldn't there be something else besides opening the restaurant eleven o'clock every morning? Shouldn't there be something better than those three weeks every August in Saratoga Springs where I stand in a pool with fifty fat middle-aged people, wishing I were home opening the restaurant at eleven o'clock in the morning? Couldn't I just once give in to my fantasies, my secret dreams, experiencing things, emotions, stimulants I've never experienced before . . . I wanted to know what it was like with another woman. Would I be successful, would she like

me, would I like the touch of her? A thousand questions that I'd never know the answer to if suddenly my name were in that obituary column tomorrow morning. So I decided to indulge myself, just once. I don't pretend I'm being fair to my wife. If she indulged herself the same way I'd never forgive her. So I started looking around . . . and, I promise you, with all intentions of having one affair, one day of pleasure and that's all. But if it was just going to be one day I wanted it to be memorable—an experience so rewarding and fulfilling that it would last me the rest of my life . . . not cheap, not sordid. And then I'd go back to opening the restaurant at eleven o'clock in the morning—but knowing that for one brief afternoon I had changed the pattern of my life, and for once I didn't just exist—I lived!

*(There is a long silence)*

ELAINE And that's why you wanted to get laid?

BARNEY I said I'd let you know when you can go. *Now* is a good time.

ELAINE I was going to cry in the middle, but I didn't want to wet your mother's carpeting.

BARNEY I had hoped you'd understand, but I didn't expect it.

ELAINE No, listen, it was terrifically entertaining. I really enjoyed it. There's one or two reasons, though, why I couldn't feel too sympathetic for the hero . . . In the first place, there is a very good possibility that that forty-four-year-old woman in Newark, New Jersey, was my mother. That'll give you some idea of my background. In the second place, any man who expects to have a beautiful, memorable and enchanting day of honest love with a woman he picks up in a fish restaurant is either sexually retarded or a latent idiot! And in the third place, no one gives a good crap about you dying because a lot of people discovered it ahead of you. We're all dying, Mr. Cashman. As a matter of fact, I myself passed away about six months ago. I'm just hanging around to clean up some business affairs

. . . Together, Barney, we blew one of the very few free afternoons we have allotted to us in this life. But I'm not putting the blame on you. It serves me right. If I had a craving for corned beef and cabbage I'd be in some big Irishman's apartment right now having the time of my life . . . *C'est la vie!* *(At the door)* Good luck, Barney, in your quest for the Impossible Dream. *(Opens the door)* Oh, please God, let there be a machine in the lobby . . .

*(And she is gone. BARNEY stands there a moment, still shaken from his experience. Then he crosses slowly and opens the drapes. He looks at his watch, then goes to the phone, picks it up and dials. Then, into the phone)*

BARNEY . . . Hello, Harriet? . . . Mr. Cashman . . . The busboy show up? . . . Well, call the agency again . . . I'll be there in about twenty minutes. I'm leaving Bloomingdale's now . . . No, I didn't get anything . . . I looked, I shopped around, but I didn't get anything . . . Well, that's the way it goes . . . I'll see you, Harriet . . . *(He bangs up. He looks around the room, then sits. He buries his head in his hands and is silent a moment)* I'll never do that again! . . . Never never never never never . . . never . . . never . . .

*Curtain*



# Act Two

The scene is the mother's apartment. It is the following August, about three in the afternoon. A key fits in the latch; the door opens, and BARNEY sticks his head in.

4

lected Plays

Veil Simon

BARNEY Mom? (He waits; there is no answer. He enters the apartment, puts the key on the shelf, and closes the door. He puts his straw hat on the railing post. He carries the attaché case, wears the summer version of his blue suit, in a lighter fabric, of course. He crosses to the dining table and puts down the attaché case. He goes to the large window and lowers the Venetian blind, crosses to the smaller windows, turns down the air conditioner and closes the blinds. He opens the attaché case and this time he has two bottles, Scotch and vodka. He takes them out, places them on the table. Then from the case he takes three packs of cigarettes and puts them on the coffee table. He goes over to the phone and dials, puts the receiver on the desk, takes a small mouth spray from his pocket and sprays mouth and fingers. He picks up the receiver, and into the phone, in a soft voice) . . . Hello, Harriet? . . . Mr. Cashman . . . (The doorbell rings) I can't talk now, I'm at the dentist. (He bangs up. BARNEY turns quickly and moves to the door. He looks out the peephole, then opens the door. BOBBI MICHELE stands there, a pretty girl of about twenty-seven. Despite the oppressive heat outside, BOBBI looks cool and fresh. She carries a large leather portfolio and a make-up bag. BARNEY smiles) Well, hello.

BOBBI Oh, thank God, air conditioning. Do you know it's a hundred and forty degrees outside? I swear, I mean it gets hot in California but nothing like this. Hi. Bobbi Michele?

BARNEY Yes, yes. Come in, I'll close the door. It's cooler.

(She comes in; he closes the door)

BOBBI I was wandering up and down the hall. All these

apartments look alike. (Looks quickly) Oh, this is nice. I like this. I'm not disturbing you now, am I? I mean you're not busy or anything?

BARNEY No, no, I was expecting you. Remember I said—

BOBBI I wasn't sure I'd be here on time. I just got through with my audition.

BARNEY No, you're fine. Remember I said three o'clock—

BOBBI It's got to be a hundred and ten, right? (Crosses to the air conditioner) I mean forget about breathing, it's over. (Stands with her back to the air conditioner) You sure I'm not disturbing you? I could come back later.

BARNEY No, I'm positive. I'm clear till five. (He smells his fingers) Can I get you a cool drink?

BOBBI I love this neighborhood. I knew this street looked familiar. I once had a girl friend who lived on this block. Forty-seventh between First and York.

BARNEY This is Thirty-seventh.

BOBBI Thirty-seventh. Of course. Then she couldn't have lived on this block. Ohh, that's better. The Shubert Theatre was a sauna bath. Oh, listen, my accompanist *did* show up, which I have you to thank for because you were so sweet in the park yesterday and I want you to know I have not forgotten it, but here I am talking and talking and I really haven't said hello yet. Hello.

BARNEY Hello.

BOBBI Hello. Here I am.

BARNEY So I see.

BOBBI Oh, God, I talk a lot when I get nervous. Have you noticed that? I'll try and stop it if I can. You'll have to forgive me.

BARNEY Are you nervous?

BOBBI Well, I'm not nervous now. I was nervous

before. I just had a terrible experience with a cab driver. Well, I don't want to go into it. Ohh, God, I just wilt in the heat. If I pass out on the floor, I'm just going to have to trust you.

BARNEY (*Smiles*) You don't have to worry.

BOBBI Well, you're not a cab driver. You wouldn't try something like that.

BARNEY Like what?

BOBBI He wanted to make it with me under the Manhattan Bridge during his lunch hour. Listen, can we forget about it, it's over now. I must look awful.

BARNEY Not at all. You look lovely.

BOBBI Oh, poof, I don't.

BARNEY You do. You do.

BOBBI Give me three minutes, I'll dazzle you. Did you get shorter?

BARNEY Shorter? Since yesterday?

BOBBI Why do you look shorter?

BARNEY I can't imagine why I should look shorter. (*He sits next to her*)

BOBBI Oh, flats.

BARNEY Flats?

BOBBI I was wearing flats yesterday. I put on heels for the audition today. I got taller. Actually, you're not really short. Well, you know that.

BARNEY Yes, well, sometimes when a person has large bones—

BOBBI You know, I couldn't make out your handwriting. I thought I had the wrong address. 432 East Thirty-seventh?

BARNEY No, that's the right address.

BOBBI Well, I should hope so. Otherwise where am I and who are you? (*She laughs; he tries to*) Oh, that's silly. If I'm goofy today, it's the heat.

BARNEY You're not goofy at all.

BOBBI I am. I'm goofy, let's face it.

BARNEY I think you're charming.

BOBBI Oh, I know I'm charming but I'm also goofy which I think is part of my charm. That's a terrible thing to say, isn't it?

BARNEY Not at all. Sometimes frankness can be—

BOBBI It's terrible, I can't help it. I'm so open about things. That's why I'm always getting myself into trouble, you know what I mean?

BARNEY What kind of trouble do you get—

BOBBI My God, I didn't even notice it. You shaved your moustache.

BARNEY What moustache?

BOBBI Didn't you have a moustache yesterday?

BARNEY Me? No.

BOBBI You *never* had a moustache?

BARNEY Never. I don't look good in a moustache. It doesn't grow in thick on the left side.

BOBBI Who am I thinking of? Who did I meet yesterday with a moustache?

BARNEY That I couldn't tell you.

BOBBI Well, I can't think straight. I'm still a nervous wreck over that cab incident. I've been back in New York three days and look what happens. I just want to forget about it.

BARNEY Certainly. How about a drink? I have J&B Scotch, Wolfschmidt vodka . . .

BOBBI I wrote the cabbie's name down. Max Schoenstein. I was going to report him to the police but he started to cry. Tears pouring down his face, I thought his cigar would go out. Then he pleaded with me he's married twenty-seven years with one son in Vietnam and another son in medical school and that he didn't mean any harm and I felt sorry for him and I said all

right, I wouldn't report him, so he thanked me and asked me to reconsider going under the Manhattan Bridge. (*Brushes her hair and poses*) How do I look? Better?

BARNEY Marvelous. Gee, that's terrible.

BOBBI Oh, it happens to me all the time. Coming in on the plane from California. The man sitting next to me kept feeling me up all during the movie. Well, I don't want to go into that. (*Looks around*) This is the kind of place I'm looking for. Does it have a terrace?

BARNEY No, no terrace. He was *feeling* you?

BOBBI Well, he said he was looking for the dial to turn up the volume but he didn't even have the headset plugged in his ears . . . Nice view.

BARNEY Why didn't you say something to him?

BOBBI Well, he was Chinese, I didn't want to seem bigoted. Then he has the nerve to call me, in the middle of the night. Some strange Chinaman.

BARNEY How'd he get your number?

BOBBI I don't know. I must have given it to him or something. What's the difference? Look, it's over, let's forget it. Am I talking too much? I haven't given you a chance to say anything.

BARNEY I'm fascinated. Those are incredible stories.

BOBBI How do you mean incredible? You don't believe them?

BARNEY I do. I do believe them.

BOBBI Because they're true.

BARNEY That's the fascinating part.

BOBBI Maybe to you. They were terrifying to me.

BARNEY To me too.

BOBBI Could I have a drink?

BARNEY What a good idea. J&B? Vodka?

BOBBI I don't provoke these things. They just happen.

BARNEY I'm not surprised. You're such a pretty girl.

BOBBI I don't know why they single me out. I'm always getting these obscene telephone calls.

BARNEY Well, there's an awful lot of that going on.

BOBBI I get them wherever I go. Once I wasn't home, he left an obscene message.

BARNEY My goodness.

BOBBI (*Looking at the photos on the table*) And the language. I never heard such filth. I once got a call where this psycho actually described vile and indecent acts for over fifteen minutes.

BARNEY FIFTEEN MINUTES!

BOBBI Listen, if you don't shut me up I'll never stop talking. What time is it?

BARNEY A quarter after three.

BOBBI Oh, God, I've got to make a call. May I? I don't have one on me.

BARNEY Yes, certainly.

BOBBI Is this where you write those sea stories you were telling me about?

BARNEY Yes, I work here during the day. Actually it's my mother's apartment.

BOBBI I knew this writer in California. A registered weirdo. He used to write these underground movies you see on Eighth Avenue. You know, *Sex Family Robinson*, *Tom Swift and His Incredible Thing . . .* I thought I was in love with him until I found out he was deranged. I mean the things he wanted me to do.

BARNEY Like what?

BOBBI Oh, God, I couldn't repeat them.

BARNEY That's all right. You can repeat them.

BOBBI (*Dials the phone and listens*) She hears the phone. She's just a lazy bitch.

BARNEY But like what? What kind of things did he want you to do?

BOBBI I couldn't tell you. I told my analyst, he went into cardiac arrest . . . Can you believe this? I could wait here twenty minutes.

BARNEY You mean things together or alone? What kind of things?

BOBBI If I tell you this man had his teeth sharpened, can you fill in the rest?  
(*She inspects the photos on the table*)

BARNEY His teeth? My God!

BOBBI The man was psychotically inclined. (*Smiles at a photo*) This is adorable. Your mother?

BARNEY (*Shakes his head*) No, it's me. But did you ever do any of them? These things he wanted?

BOBBI Me? No! Never! Of course not . . . Some. I had to do some otherwise I was afraid he would kill me. Is this you and your father?

BARNEY Yes . . . He actually forced you to do these things?

BOBBI You don't play it cool with a man who had his teeth sharpened. (*Indicating a picture*) Were you both in the Navy?

BARNEY No, if you look close it says "Queen of the Sea" on the sailor caps. I can't imagine what kind of things he made you do.

BOBBI Please forgive me for what I'm about to say, but the man was a shit. Am I forgiven?

BARNEY Certainly. How'd you get hooked up with a guy like that?

BOBBI By sheer chance. He was living with my roommate and she moved out. Hey, did I tell you about my audition?

BARNEY No, you didn't.

(*He looks at his watch*)

BOBBI Do you have to go somewhere?

BARNEY Me? No. I'm here till five. What happened at the audition?

BOBBI I was fabulous. David Merrick thought I was the end.

BARNEY No kidding? David Merrick?

BOBBI Well, it was dark, but it was someone with a moustache. Anyway, they went absolutely ape over me. They really loved me. I would have gotten the part except they wanted a Negro girl. That's how it is in the theater today. If you're not black, you're nowhere. Anyway, it was my best audition thanks to this groovy accompanist I was telling you about—which brings us to why I'm here, doesn't it? I owe you twenty dollars.

BARNEY There's no hurry.

BOBBI What do you mean? You were nice enough to lend me twenty dollars for an accompanist—a stranger you met in the park. I told you I would pay you back today, didn't I? I insist.

BARNEY Well, all right.

BOBBI The thing is, I don't have the money. I'm good for it, though. If I don't get a show in New York I may go do a series of one-night concerts in New Zealand . . . (*Takes out some photos*) I just wanted to show you some skills from this movie I was in so you'll believe I'm really an actress. That's me on location in Malibu. And those are the stars, Frankie Avalon, Annette Funicello and the Beach Boys.

BARNEY Oh, yes.

BOBBI It was a cute picture. They used the basic story of *Wuthering Heights* and worked in surfriders.

BARNEY What a good idea.

BOBBI And that's me with Fabian—

BARNEY Fabian?

BOBBI —who, and I say this with deep sincerity, is one of the great human beings I've ever met. He was unbelievably kind to me when I had my accident.

BARNEY What kind of accident?

BOBBI I was beaten up by some Mexican in a motel. (*She puts pictures back*) How I got there or who the Mexican was I'll never know. And the police'll never give you any information.

BARNEY My God, the things that happen to you.

BOBBI (*Ziping up her portfolio*) Well, I certainly don't look for it. Goodness, you must think I'm some sort of bizarre *femme fatale*. (*Picks up the phone and listens*) Can you believe this?

BARNEY Who are you calling?

BOBBI My answering service! At least she promised she'd take messages for me. I have the worst damn luck with roommates.

BARNEY You live with someone now?

BOBBI Heinrich Himmler. I can't afford my own place yet so in the meantime I'm living with this Nazi vocal teacher. She's not just German, she's actually Nazi. Wears black shirts, boots, the whole thing.

BARNEY My God.

BOBBI Great vocal coach, though—if you don't mind getting whipped.

BARNEY You're not serious?

BOBBI Oh, Wilhelmina Weirdo. She paid four hundred dollars to have a three-inch scar put on her face. My suspicion is she's sexually—er—what's the word?

BARNEY Aberrated?

BOBBI No, worse than that.

BARNEY Worse than aberrated?

BOBBI She's got this queen-size bed in her room with a *leather* bedspread. Does that seem funny to you?

BARNEY Well, you live with her, you'd know better.

BOBBI Goodness, how would I know? I'm no lesbian. I'm only staying there because she's a damned good vocal teacher and she's not taking any rent.

BARNEY How come?

BOBBI Because she thinks I'm going to make it very big in this business and she wants to get in on the ground floor! . . . Oh! Finally! (*Into the phone*) Hello, Hilda? Was nicht gessen? Auf lighter shein bister? . . . (*To BARNEY, smiling*) I make up German, she gets hysterical . . . (*Back into the phone*) . . . Nowhere . . . With a friend . . . Did the Merv Griffin Show call? . . . Well, how would you know? Where were you for twenty minutes, downstairs in the bunker? . . . (*Smiles at BARNEY. Into phone*) I already told you, just a friend . . . It's not another girl . . . No, I don't think I'll be home for dinner . . . I *won't* be home for dinner . . . Just a minute . . . (*To BARNEY*) Are we going to have dinner?

BARNEY I don't think I can tonight.

BOBBI (*Into the phone*) Yes, I'll be home for dinner . . . About six . . . I promise . . . I said I promise, didn't I? . . . Then *auf Wiedersehen*. (*She bangs up*) Do you know, if they'd won the war she'd be choral director at Radio City Music Hall?

BARNEY If you're so uncomfortable, why do you stay with her?

BOBBI You know, you're the second person who's accused me of being homosexual.

BARNEY I never said you were hom—

BOBBI My goodness, the thought of it makes my skin crawl. That's the one thing in life I find revolting. I mean I sleep so far away from her in that bed she'd have to take a taxi to get near me. People can be so vicious sometimes . . .

BARNEY I never for a minute suggested—

BOBBI Are you married?

BARNEY Yes, Yes, I'm married.

BOBBI The other person who suggested it was this kinky writer who would stoop to anything because I wouldn't do these "terrible things" I told you about before . . . I mean not *all* of them.

(*She opens the make-up box and takes out a brush*)

BARNEY Listen, you sure you wouldn't want a drink?

BOBBI (*Brushing her hair again*) I didn't mean you when I said people can be vicious sometimes.

BARNEY That's all right.

BOBBI You're not vicious. You're married. Married men are rarely vicious. They're too guilty.

BARNEY Do you find that?

BOBBI Without exception. Except for this one married man I knew. Was he ever vicious. (*She stops brushing, and puts the brush back*) Goodness, I'm letting you in on everything. Whatever happened to the Woman of Mystery? Do you mind terribly if I smoke?

BARNEY No, no. Please smoke (*Rushes to the cigarettes on the table*) I have plenty of cigarettes. Filters, mentholated, super king, whatever you want.

BOBBI (*Takes out a small case from her make-up box*) I have my own, thanks. (*She opens the box*) Promise me you won't ask me about this married man because it's one episode in my life I'd rather not discuss.

(*She takes out a thin cigarette and holds it out.*  
BARNEY *opens a box of cocktail matches he just bought for the occasion*)

BARNEY Certainly. I understand that.

BOBBI If I tell you, it'll go no further than this room?

BARNEY You don't have to discuss it if it's painful. (*He lights her cigarette. She takes a long drag*)

BOBBI For obvious reasons, I can't reveal his identity. Let's just call him Mr. H. That's all I'll divulge about him. Mr. H.

BARNEY (*Puts out the match*) I understand.

BOBBI (*Takes another drag*) Arnold H. He lives in Palm

Springs, California, and is in the hotel business. (*She takes a long breath*) You've heard of him, I'm sure. He had a big spread in *Time* magazine.

BARNEY When was that?

BOBBI I'm sorry, I can't betray any confidences. I don't think we should talk about it. Would you like one of these?

BARNEY I don't really smoke.

BOBBI I don't either. I mean, not cigarettes. Anyway, I met Mr. H. about two years ago in Arizona. I was a house guest of this very short movie producer and one ni—

BARNEY Excuse me. I don't want to interrupt. Is that—

(*He mounds the word "marijuana"*)

BOBBI (*Looks at him, puzzled*) I didn't catch the last word.

BARNEY (*Looks around nervously*) I didn't want to say it too loud. There's an old lady next door who listens to everything. Is that . . . (*He leans in and whispers*) marijuana?

BOBBI (*Nods*) Mmm.

BARNEY Pot?

BOBBI Yes. Change your mind?

BARNEY No.

BOBBI You sure?

BARNEY I'm trying to cut down.

BOBBI Actually it's a blend. Half Turkish tobacco, half grass. It's prescribed by my doctor in Beverly Hills. I take it instead of a tranquilizer because I have this inability to swallow pills. (*Holds out the box*) You sure? They're not strong. They're a twenty-minute freak-out at the most.

BARNEY Maybe later.

BOBBI I take it for medicinal purposes, but you can get high if you like. By the way, you have a nice smile.

BARNEY Other people have told me that.

BOBBI You're a very basic person, no crap. Am I right?

BARNEY Well . . .

BOBBI Sincere . . . sweet . . . You meet so damn few in my business . . . Well, anywhere for that matter . . .

BARNEY Well, most people that I've run across . . .

BOBBI *(She sits back, and suddenly begins to sing)*

What the world needs now is love, sweet love  
That's the only thing that there's just too  
little of . . .\*

That's what I'm going to do if I get the Merv Griffin show. If the Beast of Berlin ever takes my messages. *(Looks around)* I like the color of these walls. I am so sick of white walls . . . Is the door locked?

BARNEY The door? Yes. Is it all right?

BOBBI I just wanted to make sure. I thought I saw somebody following me outside. Probably not . . . Is this a rent-controlled building?

BARNEY *(Nervously)* What do you mean? Who would follow you?

BOBBI Who indeed? That's a good question. I'm just being silly. *(Takes another drag)* Why don't you just check the lock?

BARNEY *(Starts toward the door)* It's locked, I checked . . . You mean it's possible someone knows you're here with me? Now?

BOBBI *(Smiles)* Oh, that's sweet. You're worried some jealous nut is going to rush in here and blow our brains out. Wouldn't that be a kick, a regular blood bath . . .

BARNEY Oh, jeez—

BOBBI Well, it's one way of getting your name in the papers. *(Reassuring him)* No, I think we're okay . . . *(She takes another drag)*

BARNEY *(Nods without listening)* Look, er, Bobbi. You understand, of course, that my intention in asking you here today was merely one of convenience. I mean you wanted to pay me back the twenty dollars and I thought this was as good a place as any—

BOBBI My goodness, that was understood. I certainly didn't think I was coming here to be seduced. *(She puts the "stick" out in the ashtray)* All gone. Finished my pot like a good little girl. *(Points to the ashtray)* Don't forget to get rid of this. Tear the paper, scatter the ashes and flush the toilet twice. You can't imagine the number of people who are serving time today because they only flushed once.

BARNEY Flush twice . . . That's a good thing to remember. *(He takes the ashtray and walks toward the bathroom. Waves the air with his hand)* It leaves a slight odor, doesn't it?

*(He enters the bathroom)*

BOBBI You want me to open the window?

BARNEY *(Offstage)* You understand, of course, when I spoke to you in the park *(Toilet flushes)* it was only because I thought you were in trouble. I mean I never do things like that, it's very rare for me. The thing is you looked so all alone *(Toilet flushes)* and you had this sad look on your face—so troubled, so distraught . . . *(He comes out of the bathroom)*

BOBBI *(Peering through the blinds)* Did you ever see that man before?

BARNEY What man?

*(BOBBI beckons him with her finger. BARNEY moves quickly to the window and peers out)*

BOBBI The one across the street. In front of that building. Have you ever seen him standing there?

BARNEY All the time. He's the doorman.

\*From "What the World Needs Now is Love," by Burt Bacharach and Hal David. Copyright © 1965 by Blue Sens Music, Inc. and Joe Music Co., Inc. All rights reserved.

BOBBI I was just wondering. (*Looks at BARNEY*) Do you think I'm being silly?

BARNEY No... Well, I'm not sure. You certainly seem worried about something... Even when you were sitting in the park.

BOBBI Can I trust you? I mean absolutely trust you?

BARNEY I'd—like to be your friend.

BOBBI (*She pours Scotch into a glass*) I'm not crazy or anything, so what I tell you you must accept as the gospel truth. Do you know he had my dog kidnapped?

BARNEY Who?

BOBBI Mr. H... of Palm Springs, California... He had my thirteen-month-old Lhasa Apso kidnapped. You promised I could trust you.

BARNEY I wouldn't tell that to anyone. Why would he kidnap your dog?

BOBBI Do you think I'm making that up?

BARNEY No. You tell me a man kidnapped your dog, I accept it.

BOBBI I mean the dog is gone. He loves me and he knows his way home, so he's obviously being held against his will.

(*She pours the Scotch back into the bottle*)

BARNEY Your Lhasa Apso? Did you call the police?

BOBBI What's the point? They're in on it too.

BARNEY The police are in on the kidnap of your Lhasa Apso?

BOBBI Mr. H. is also one of the biggest political bigwigs in California. Who would you say the police are more likely to cooperate with? (*Takes off her shoes*) Listen, the things I could tell about men I've met. Some day I'm going to write a book naming names, dates and places. I wouldn't leave a *single* man out.

BARNEY (*Nervously*) Well, I'm sure once in a while you must have met some *nice* men.

BOBBI Oh, you wouldn't be in the book. You have sensitive hands. (*She takes his hand*) That's how I knew you were nice in the park. I can tell everything about a person by just looking at his hands. You have such long, delicate fingers...

BARNEY I knew a girl in school who was able to determine a person's character by—

BOBBI (*Singing*)

What's it all about, Alfie? Is it just for the moment we live?

What's it all about, when you sort it out—\*  
I smell oysters.

BARNEY What?

BOBBI What could that be?

BARNEY (*Moves his hand away*) I can't imagine. Look, Bobbi, the reason I asked you up here today...

BOBBI God, how I miss my dog. He kidnapped him because he was jealous of anyone or anything I cared about. He didn't want me to have a dog or a car or a career. Especially a career. He knows I'm enormously talented and he's afraid of losing me. Well, that's his problem because nothing's going to stop me. I'm going to make good no matter how many opportunities he tries to block. I've got it, I know that. Ask anyone on the Coast. The talent's there, it's just a question of time. Do you know he had me fired from the Coconut Grove? Did you hear about that?

BARNEY Er, no, I didn't.

BOBBI On opening night. After the first show. And I was fabulous. You could ask my agent, he'll give you an unbiased rave... Did you ever stop to wonder why I was never on the *Hollywood Palace*?

BARNEY I... er... really can't say that I did.



BOBBI I had a two-week contract at the Cocoanut Grove. They had to pay me off. But I wasn't allowed to sing the second show. Who would you say was responsible for that?

BARNEY Sure sounds like Mr. H. to me.

BOBBI Because he knew the producers of the *Hollywood Palace* were coming for the second show. And let me ask you another question. I had the best orchestrations for any night club singer on the West Coast, right?

BARNEY Right.

BOBBI Then who stole the trumpet parts five minutes before show time?

BARNEY Could it have been the same ones who were in on the Lhasa Apso job?

BOBBI (*Stares at him*) Are you trying to put me on?

BARNEY I'm not. I swear I'm not. I think I'll have a drink.

BOBBI That's why I had to leave the Coast. He blocked every move I made. (*BOBBI laughs*) You know he once tried to have me committed to a hospital?

BARNEY No. Why?

BOBBI Obviously to keep tabs on me. Actually it was my own fault. I was faking a nervous breakdown so he'd leave me alone. I made believe I went crazy in a department store one day and the police came with an ambulance. He must have had me followed because the ambulance was there in five minutes. Who else could have sent them?

BARNEY (*Nods*) What did they do?

BOBBI Oh, they just held me for observation.

BARNEY And sent you home?

BOBBI In twelve weeks. He must have paid them off. Otherwise why would they keep me there? It wasn't too bad, I wasn't working anyway. I ask you, is that some experience?

BARNEY (*Nods*) Some experience.

BOBBI Hey, have you ever heard of Babylon Revisited?

BARNEY Who?

BOBBI Babylon Revisited. It's a rock group. They want me to record with them. But once you do the Janis Joplin scene your voice is gone in two years. Don't you think I'm better off taking the David Merrick show?

BARNEY I thought they turned you down?

BOBBI Where did you hear that?

BARNEY *You* told me before.

BOBBI I didn't say they turned me down. I said they took the black girl.

BARNEY But you didn't get the part.

BOBBI What are you trying to say?

BARNEY I'm not trying to say anything. Hey, listen, don't get angry with me.

BOBBI (*Tensely*) I'm not angry with anyone.

BARNEY Well, you seem upset.

BOBBI I am not upset. I am not angry. I am not uptight. I am not anything . . . I'm turning on again.

BARNEY (*Nervously*) Listen, I'm not sure that's a good idea. Anyway, the thing is . . . it's getting kind of late, you know?

BOBBI And you want me to leave.

BARNEY No, I don't *want* you to leave—

BOBBI But you'd be happier if I left.

BARNEY Happier? No, not happier—

BOBBI Don't worry. I'm not going to try anything.

BARNEY Try what? Like what? What would you try?

BOBBI Nothing. I thought you were looking at the scars on my wrist. You're wrong about them.

BARNEY I wasn't even looking at them. I didn't even

know you had them. Listen, your scars are your business.

BOBBI I was watering plants and the window fell on my wrists.

BARNEY That happens so often. I know people who have the same scars.

BOBBI Please forgive me. I'm suspicious of everyone. I really have to run.

BARNEY Oh, that's too bad. Just when we were getting acquainted. *But*—if you have to rush off.

BOBBI (*Opens the box*) I just have to have a few drags before I face the world again.

BARNEY Now? Now? Wouldn't you be better off facing the world first and then relaxing when you get home?

BOBBI Doctor's orders.

BARNEY Well, I wouldn't want you to go without your medicine but (*She takes out two sticks*) as I said before, I'm way behind in this story— (*She holds one out to him*) What's that?

BOBBI You said you'd have one with me later.

BARNEY I said "maybe" later. *Maybe* . . .

BOBBI You said "later."

BARNEY No, no. I said "maybe later." I remember saying the maybe just before the later. We were talking about that incident with the Mexican in the motel.

BOBBI I think it's very impolite of you. I'm not going unless you have one with me . . . if I have to stay all night.

BARNEY Two puffs. Two quick puffs and then I really have to get back to work.  
(*He puts it in his mouth and takes the matches*)

BOBBI I like the way you hold it in your mouth. You

can tell a lot about a man by the way he holds pot in his mouth.

BARNEY Here we go.  
(*He lights both*)

BOBBI Good?

BARNEY Oh, yeah. Mm, man, that's pot.

BOBBI It's better when you close your eyes.

BARNEY Oh, listen, don't I know. But I really don't have time to close my eyes. I'm just taking one more puff and then I've got to get to work. (*He takes another quick drag*) Okay. Finished. Really terrific. My best pot this week.

(*He starts to put it out in the asbtray*)

BOBBI Let me see you get it in your lungs and hold it there.

BARNEY You don't want to see that. There's nothing to see. A man with pot in his lungs. You must have seen it a hundred times.

BOBBI Why won't you inhale it?

BARNEY I will. I will. Watch. I promise.

(*He takes another drag*)

BOBBI Swallow it.

BARNEY Hmm?

BOBBI Swallow it! (*BARNEY swallows*) Okay, now exhale.

(*BARNEY exhales; nothing comes out*)

BARNEY Oh, my God, it didn't come out. It's still in there.

BOBBI In a few minutes your mouth will feel numb and your toes will start to tingle.

BARNEY Good, good, I can't wait.

BOBBI What do you feel now?

BARNEY Outside of sharp pain, nothing very much.

BOBBI Is your mouth getting dry?

BARNEY A little. (*Tests his mouth*) It's drying now. (*Tests it again*) There it goes, it's all dried up.

BOBBI This is quality grass. You can tell, can't you? It's from South America.

BARNEY Well, you know what they say: "You can take pot out of the country, but you can't take the—"

BOBBI Toes tingling yet?

BARNEY (*Nods*) Toes tingling.

BOBBI Relaxed?

BARNEY Relaxed . . . Oh, my God, my tongue is paralyzed. I just lost the use of my tongue. I'll never talk again.

BOBBI You're high, baby, just sit back and enjoy it.

BARNEY I'll try, I'll try . . . Everything is slowing down. Do you feel everything slowing down?

BOBBI Mm-hmmm.

BARNEY (*Puts his hand on his chest*) Oh, God, I don't feel my heart. What the hell happened to my heart?

BOBBI Relax . . . Don't fight it, honey.

BARNEY I'm not. I'm not fighting it. I'm letting it do whatever it wants.

BOBBI Hang it out for the world to see, honey.

BARNEY I'm hanging it out. Here I go. I don't know where I'm going, but I'm going . . .

BOBBI Just let yourself go.

BARNEY Oh, boy, what's that? What is that?

BOBBI What?

BARNEY I hear my eyes blinking—thump, thump—  
There it goes again, thump!

BOBBI If you got it, baby, flaunt it.

BARNEY I'm flaunting it, I'm flaunting it. (*A big, enormous smile spreads across his face*) Wheeeeee!

BOBBI God, the things that have happened to me.

BARNEY I heard, I heard. I can't wait to read the book.

BOBBI Did I tell you about this man in California?

BARNEY The dognapper or the teeth-sharpener?

BOBBI Well, I was in love with him. You know about love, I can tell . . . You must have suffered plenty, didn't you?

BARNEY Many years ago I was involved with an older woman in Newark, New Jersey.

BOBBI Oh, yeah, I know that scene. How long did it last?

BARNEY About fifteen minutes.

BOBBI You got to make it alone in this world. All I need is one show. The talent's there, it's just a question of time.

BARNEY That's all it is, Bob.

BOBBI People don't want to see you make good . . . they're all jealous . . . they're all rotten . . . they're all vicious.

BARNEY So many things I wanted to do . . . but I'll never do 'em. So many places I wanted to see . . . I'll never see 'em. Trapped . . . we're all trapped . . . Help! Help!

BOBBI (*After a moment's quiet she begins to sing*)  
What the world needs now, is love, sweet love  
  
(*BARNEY joins her, bumming along*)  
That's the only thing that there's just too little of . . .

Curtain

# Act Three

*It is the following September; the usual hour again, about three in the afternoon. The key in the lock; the door opens. BARNEY'S head peers in. He enters.*

*No dark blue business suit for BARNEY this time. He wears a gay glen-plaid sports jacket, tan slacks, a blue shirt and a joyful tie. The attaché case, however, is standard equipment. He puts the key on the shelf, closes the door, places the attaché case on the dining table and opens it. BARNEY is a bit more inspired this time. He takes out a bottle of champagne and walks to the kitchen, humming as he goes, and pausing to hit the light switch on his way past. We hear the refrigerator door open and close, and BARNEY returns with a glass of water which he leaves on the sideboard as he goes to the attaché case. He takes out two champagne glasses, and as he is attempting to remove the label from one of them the doorbell rings. He straightens his hair, adjusts his tie and goes to the door. He again peers out the peephole, then opens the door. JEANETTE FISHER stands there. She is about thirty-nine years old, a woman of no discernible physical attributes. There is only one distinguishable quality about JEANETTE FISHER. She is probably the singularly most depressed woman on the face of the Western Hemisphere. She wakes up to gloom and goes to bed with gloom. She fills the in-between hours with despair. She wears a beige dress and matching stole.*

*She looks at BARNEY, and then nervously glances around the room.*

BARNEY *(With some sincerity)* Hello, Jeanette! *(He extends his hand and leads her into the room, closing the door behind him)* Any trouble finding the place? *(She shakes her head "no")* It's not raining yet, is it? *(She shakes her head "no" again)* Good. Good. *(He starts to walk around to her front but she turns away, her back to him, not looking at anything in particular)* Jeanette, there's nothing wrong, is there? *(Another wordless shake of her head. He goes over and takes her hand)* Well, then, come here and sit down . . . Hey, come on, Jeanette, look at me. *(She finally picks her head up and looks at him)*

You okay? *(She finally manages a small smile and nods "yes")* Come here. *(He leads her to the sofa; they both sit)* Listen, there's no sense in denying this is a little awkward. But that's why I respect you, Jeanette. If you weren't nervous, if you just barged in here, cold and callous like some women could, or if you were some—some nut I met in the park, that would be one thing. But you're not, Jeanette. You are the only one in our circle, the only one of Thelma's friends that I have ever had any respect or feeling for. That's why I was so happy the other night when we were having dinner at your place, when you indicated to me—*(Suddenly JEANETTE begins to sob quietly)* Oh, Jeanette, don't. It's all right. *(She grabs a handkerchief out of her pocketbook and cries quietly into it)* Hey, come on, Jeanette. None of that now . . . *(She is sobbing. He starts to put his arm around her shoulder to comfort her)* Listen, it's all right. It's just me. Barney. *(She pushes him away. He looks around, not knowing what to do)* Jeanette, you're not going to sit here crying until five o'clock, are you? . . . Are you? *(JEANETTE suddenly jumps up and rushes into the bathroom, still sobbing. BARNEY gets up)* Jeanette! . . . Jeanette? *(But she's in the bathroom. He goes over and listens to her through the door. Then he walks away and throws his arms up in dismay)* Oh, Christ! *(He talks to himself)* Boy, can you pick 'em. Can you pick 'em!

*(The door suddenly opens and JEANETTE stands there. She has stopped crying. BARNEY looks at her in anticipation. She smiles at him)*

JEANETTE Why am I here, Barney?

BARNEY What was that?

JEANETTE Why am I here? I've known you and Thelma for twelve years. She's been a good friend to me. I wouldn't hurt her for the world. You and Mel are closer than brothers. So why am I here?

BARNEY Why? Because I asked you here, that's why. I'm very fond of you. Look, why don't you put your pocketbook down, Jeanette, and relax, and I'll go in-side and get us a drink, okay?  
*(He starts for the kitchen)*

JEANETTE I don't find you physically attractive. You knew that, didn't you?  
(*That stops him*)

BARNEY No! No, I didn't know that . . . It doesn't surprise me . . . I mean it's not mandatory . . .

JEANETTE I think you're sweet . . . I think you're basically a good person. I do not think you're physically attractive.

BARNEY (*Cheerfully*) Listen, you can't win 'em all.

JEANETTE I can be honest with you, Barney, can't I? I think we've known each other long enough for that, haven't we?

BARNEY (*The good sport*) Hell, yes.

JEANETTE So I can just come out and say it, can't I? I do not find you physically attractive.

BARNEY (*Smiling*) Fine, fine. Listen, I think we've covered that ground pretty good, Jeanette. So why don't I go get the drinks and you put down your pocket-book and relax and then—

JEANETTE Don't misunderstand me. It's not the weight. The weight thing doesn't bother me. I have never been repelled by obesity.

BARNEY I'm glad to hear that, Jeanette. Actually I was a skinny kid. I blew up in the army. I was a mess sergeant in Fort Totten for about two years and I would constantly—

JEANETTE I am attracted to you emotionally, intellectually—

BARNEY Isn't that funny? I always felt that you and I had a certain rapport—

JEANETTE But not physically.

BARNEY (*Nods*) Not physically. We established that a number of times. Would you excuse me one second, Jeanette. I want to get the champagne.  
(*He starts again*)

JEANETTE Barney, do you know I haven't slept with Mel in eight months?

BARNEY (*That stops him again*) No, I didn't. Eight months, my God. I knew Mel had a bad back but I had no idea—

JEANETTE *Have not* slept with him in eight months.

BARNEY Well, listen, Jeanette, that's none of my business, really. That's between you and Mel . . .

JEANETTE He's slept with me. I haven't slept with him.

BARNEY (*Looks at her, puzzled*) How does that work out?

JEANETTE I don't particularly enjoy sex, Barney.

BARNEY Is that right? Ever?

JEANETTE It was important to me once. Nothing is very important to me any more.

BARNEY You're just tense, Jeanette. You're going through a dry period right now. Eight months, my God, no wonder . . .

JEANETTE Has Mel indicated in any way there was any trouble between us?

BARNEY None. Mel is not a talker.

JEANETTE I know you see him all the time.

BARNEY I play handball with him on Saturday mornings. We never discuss personal problems. He serves, I hit it back.

JEANETTE He didn't seem upset?

BARNEY No. Can I take your pocketbook, Jeanette?

JEANETTE *You* wouldn't talk, would you, Barney?

BARNEY Me, Jeanette? I'm surprised that you would even think—

JEANETTE Then I don't have to worry about my name ever coming up in a cocktail party—

BARNEY May God strike me dead! May I never live to

see my oldest girl married, if I ever mentioned even casually—

JEANETTE Swear!

BARNEY I just swore. May I become totally paralyzed from the hips down—

JEANETTE It was not easy for me to come here today.

BARNEY May my hands get crippled with arthritis. I'm surprised that you would even think . . .

JEANETTE I'm not very good at this sort of thing, Barney.

BARNEY Who is, Jeanette?

JEANETTE I don't even know what I'm supposed to do.

BARNEY I'd put my pocketbook down first if I were you . . .

JEANETTE (*She gets up*) My only concern is that whatever happens between us will never go beyond these four walls.

(*She crosses to the window*)

BARNEY May my restaurant be destroyed by fire, Jeanette. You'll never have to worry as long as you live. I told you that the other night.

JEANETTE Did Mel ever mention being involved with another woman?

BARNEY No.

JEANETTE Would you tell me if he did?

BARNEY Yes. Yes, I would tell you.

JEANETTE You would?

BARNEY Yes.

JEANETTE Why would you tell me?

BARNEY I don't know why. You asked me if I would, I'm trying to be polite, that's all.

JEANETTE I see.

BARNEY Can I take your pocketbook, Jeanette?

JEANETTE What do you think about all this, Barney?

BARNEY About all what?

JEANETTE About all this that's going on.

BARNEY *Nothing's* going on, Jeanette. I can't even get your pocketbook.

JEANETTE You're not appalled by the times we live in, by all the promiscuity you find everywhere?

BARNEY I don't find it anywhere. I *bear* a lot about it, I haven't found any. You want to sit down a few minutes? You're here, you might as well sit.

JEANETTE Let me ask you a question, Barney. Do you have any guilt about asking me here today?

BARNEY Do I have any guilt?

JEANETTE Don't repeat the question, just answer it.

BARNEY What? Do I have any guilt? . . . No, I do not.

JEANETTE In other words, you don't care who you hurt?

BARNEY I'm not hurting anyone.

JEANETTE Really? You want to think about that answer?

BARNEY Not necessarily . . . Why probe deeply into everything?

JEANETTE Exactly. That's the attitude we live with today. Don't think about it. Well, I'm not going to think about it, Barney. I'm going to become like everyone else in the world. That's why I'm here today.

(*She opens her purse, takes out a pillbox and puts a pill in her mouth*)

BARNEY Somehow I think we've gotten off on a tangent, Jeanette . . . What are you doing? What's that?

JEANETTE Digilene. It's for depression.

BARNEY Don't you want any water?

JEANETTE I couldn't wait.

BARNEY Until I brought the water? You're *that* depressed?

JEANETTE Isn't that how we cope with our problems today, Barney? With pills, drugs . . . Do you know how many people in this country take pills because they cannot cope with emotional problems? Do you know the number in this country? It was in *Look* magazine.

BARNEY I didn't get a haircut this week, I missed the new *Look*.

JEANETTE Sixty million.

BARNEY That many?

JEANETTE Do you know the alternative to taking pills?

BARNEY Was this in the same issue?

JEANETTE Melancholia. Do you know what that is? Melancholia?

BARNEY Brooding, isn't it? Heavy brooding?

JEANETTE I'll tell you what melancholia is, Barney, because I've had it for the last eight months. It's total and complete despair. It's waking up each morning of your life not wanting anything, not hoping, not caring, not needing. You don't pray for happiness because you don't believe it exists, and you don't wish for death because if you don't exist, then death is meaningless. All that's left is a quiet, endless, bottomless, relentless, eternal, infinite gloom. That's melancholia.

(*There is a long, awkward pause as BARNEY thinks about how to retrieve the afternoon*)

BARNEY Hey, how about a nice, cool drink? I bet that would pick you up?

JEANETTE What do you want with me anyway, Barney, a good time? You're not going to have a good time with me.

BARNEY I think we could have an interesting afternoon if we got off the gloom and the brooding, I really do,

Jeanette. Why don't I get the champagne while you put down your pocketbook and relax—

JEANETTE You mean Mel never mentioned another woman to you?

BARNEY As God is my judge. You seem so different from the other night, Jeanette, so tense. I don't know, you had such a zest and spirit about you.

JEANETTE It was not easy for me to come here today.

BARNEY I understand that.

JEANETTE If anyone knew or even suspected—

BARNEY May I become deformed in all my vital organs—stop it already, Jeanette, no one's going to know. I'm going to get the wine and I want you to sit back and relax. (*He starts out, and stops at the table*) You see this table?

JEANETTE Yes.

BARNEY (*Taps it*) Good spot for your pocketbook. (*He starts off*)

JEANETTE Barney, do you know I can't taste food?

BARNEY Oh, now wait a minute, Jeanette. I can't believe that. I can well understand your being in a state of depression most of the time but you can certainly taste food.

JEANETTE I can *not* taste food.

BARNEY It may not taste *good* to you, but you can taste it.

JEANETTE Can *not* taste food.

BARNEY What are you saying, Jeanette? You had two pieces of pot roast the other night, I saw you.

JEANETTE I eat what's in front of me. It doesn't make too much difference.

BARNEY It wasn't in front of you, you got up and took a second piece. Well, what's the difference. It's how you feel that's important.

JEANETTE And how do you feel, Barney? About being here with Mel's wife?

BARNEY Why do you put it that way? You're Jeanette, I'm Barney. Why do you complicate everything?

JEANETTE (*Gets up, goes to the phone and picks up the receiver*) What do you think Mel's reaction would be if I called him now and told him what was going on here?

BARNEY (*Gets up and crosses to her*) Big! I think his reaction would be big! (*He takes the phone away from her*) With a lot of killing and murder. (*He moves across the room with the phone*) Don't test him, Jeanette. It's not good for a marriage to test it too much. (*He pushes the phone behind the lamp*)

JEANETTE Do you think death is so terrible, Barney?

BARNEY Death? I do. I think death is terrible. I think violent death is the worst . . . Jeanette, I think we're getting a little morbid here . . .

JEANETTE You don't think there are worse things than death?

BARNEY Like suffering and pain? They're bad, but they're second and third after death. Death is first . . . Jeanette, I really think you should have some champagne.

JEANETTE You mean you enjoy your life? You like living?

BARNEY I love living. I have some problems with my life, but living is the best thing they've come up with so far . . . Look, Jeanette, I know you're going through analysis right now, but I don't think this is a good time to talk shop. (*He reaches for her pocketbook*) Why don't you let me take your pocketbook and—

JEANETTE (*Pulls it aside away from him*) Tell me what you like about living, Barney.

BARNEY What I like? I like all of it.

JEANETTE All of it?

BARNEY A lot of it. A lot of it is very nice.

JEANETTE For example.

BARNEY For example? You mean like what are my favorite things? Is that what you mean? Your pocketbook is really getting me crazy. Put it on the floor, nothing'll happen to it.

JEANETTE (*She doesn't, of course*) What makes life worth getting up for? Name emotions for me, feelings . . . LAST OF THE  
WHAT GIVES YOU THE STRENGTH TO GO ON, BARNEY?

BARNEY Well, that takes in such a wide area, Jeanette. I don't think I could cover it in one statement. Do you mean single items like love or sex or family? (*He has been staring at her pocketbook, and finally leaps at her*) Let me have that goddamned pocketbook! (*He grabs it from her*) Nothing'll happen to it, I'll leave it right here! (*He puts it on the desk and sinks into a chair*) I'm sorry, Jeanette, I couldn't stand it any more. Oh, I feel so much better.

JEANETTE How much of life do you actually enjoy, Barney?

BARNEY You're still on that, Jeanette?

JEANETTE Give me a number, a percentage.

BARNEY A percentage? How much of a percentage of life do I enjoy? I couldn't answer that, Jeanette. It would be meaningless . . . Half! About half. Fifty-one, fifty-two percent, something like that. I'm just giving you a figure off the top of my head.

JEANETTE Do you know what my percentage is? Do you know what Doctor Margolies estimated my percentage of happiness is?

BARNEY (*Thinks*) Low. I would imagine it was low.

JEANETTE Eight point two percent.

BARNEY I estimated something like that.

JEANETTE I'm thirty-nine years old, Barney. I've enjoyed eight point two percent of my life.

BARNEY You actually sat down with a pencil and paper and figured that out? No wonder you're so depressed.



I mean I depressed myself with the fifty-one percent. I can understand how you feel with an eight point two.

JEANETTE Do you think that people are basically good?

BARNEY Another question?

JEANETTE Do you think the world is populated with decent, loving, gentle human beings?

BARNEY (*He'd better think about that*) . . . Not all of them. There's no question about that, Jeanette. Certainly not all of them.

JEANETTE In other words, you think there are *some*. *Some* people are decent—

BARNEY Right.

JEANETTE —loving—

BARNEY Right.

JEANETTE —gentle—human beings.

BARNEY Right.

JEANETTE Name some.

BARNEY I knew that was your next question. I would have bet my life on it.

JEANETTE Name ten, Barney.

BARNEY Name ten. There's a point to all this. I don't see it yet but I know there's a point.

JEANETTE Name *five*. Five people you think are decent, gentle and loving. Name *three*.

BARNEY Three? Three people out of the whole world? That's ridiculous. I can name three hundred, three *thousand* . . .

JEANETTE Just three.

BARNEY Living or dead?

JEANETTE Three people, Barney, three fellow human beings—who are gentle, loving and decent.

BARNEY You think I can't do it. No one can be that cynical, Jeanette. No one could be *that* contemptuous of the world. Okay. I'll play. Here we go. At the top of my list, I pick, in the number-one spot . . . this one's going to surprise you . . . Are you ready?

JEANETTE I'm ready.

BARNEY Thelma. My wife Thelma.

JEANETTE That's one.

BARNEY You agree with Thelma? I mean relatives are not prohibited?

JEANETTE Thelma is certainly a gentle and loving woman.

BARNEY Oh, good. You agree. Thank you. So I need two more and I'm in.

JEANETTE So far you have Thelma.

BARNEY I've *said* that already. I'm thinking, I want to be selective . . . For second I would pick—I don't know, is John F. Kennedy acceptable to you?

JEANETTE If he's acceptable to you.

BARNEY Certainly he's acceptable to me. He's acceptable to *everyone*. I'll tell you the truth, Jeanette, when you told me in the kitchen the other night that you were willing, even *anxious* to meet me here today, I had no idea it was to play this game.

BARNEY One second. Let me finish my list first. (*Enumerates on his fingers*) Thelma, my wife, John F. Kennedy . . . and, I don't know, Christ—oh, yes. Him. Christ! All right? Three?

JEANETTE I'm trying to prove to you why I'm here. All right, let's forget it, we'll have the champagne.

JEANETTE Three. You did it, Barney. You actually

found three people who you consider gentle, loving and decent. I congratulate you.

BARNEY You don't have to congratulate me, it wasn't so hard. I just picked the Big Three—Kennedy, Christ and Thelma. For God's sakes, Jeanette, if anyone heard this conversation . . .

JEANETTE I couldn't do it, Barney. I couldn't pick three people. Not in this world.

BARNEY In thirty-nine years, you have never met—

JEANETTE Never!

BARNEY During your eight point two percent of happiness, surely there were three people—

JEANETTE There weren't.

BARNEY Not even a close friend or a girl you went to school with?

JEANETTE Who?

BARNEY I don't know who you went to school with! All right, what about Christ? Are you going to tell me Jesus Christ was not a decent, gentle, loving man? or John F. Kennedy?

JEANETTE Mention people I know.

BARNEY All right, Thelma. Will you agree with Thelma?

JEANETTE I told you before. I consider Thelma a gentle and loving woman.

BARNEY Wait a minute. Hold it a second. What about decent? That's the second time you left out decent. The first time I thought it was an oversight, this time I'd like to discuss it. Why did you leave out decent?

JEANETTE Do you consider her decent?

BARNEY Thelma? My wife Thelma? What's the matter with you? She's the most decent human being on earth. Ask anyone. Thelma is the epitome of decency. My God, Thelma Cashman is synonymous with the word "decent."

JEANETTE That's wonderful.

BARNEY Why, have you heard something?

JEANETTE Of course not.

BARNEY Then why did you leave out decent?

JEANETTE She's on *your* list. It's not important if she's on mine.

BARNEY What are you trying to do, Jeanette? Are you making inferences concerning the decency of my wife Thelma?

JEANETTE I'm not making inferences, Barney. *You're* indicating some doubt.

BARNEY *Doubt? Doubt?* About Thelma? (*Laughs*) Good God, what the hell is there to doubt about Thelma?

JEANETTE How would I know, Barney?

BARNEY Well, I'll tell you. **NOTHING! THERE IS NOTHING TO DOUBT ABOUT THELMA!**

JEANETTE As long as you're sure.

BARNEY (*Shouting*) Don't tell me "as long as I'm sure" because I'm sure. I have lived with the woman my whole life. I grew up with her. I know every nerve fiber in her body, every thought that's ever been in her head. The woman is without malice, without jealousy. Thelma Cashman is *beyond* reproach. She is as totally incapable of an act of deception as *you* would be or *I* would be or—oh, my God!

(*He stumps in his seat. She stares at him*)

JEANETTE (*A long pause*) So you have Kennedy and Christ! You have one more pick.

BARNEY It's not true! Not Thelma, it's not true. She's not like other people. She's gentle and loving and decent.

JEANETTE In other words, you agree that other people are *not* gentle and loving and decent?

BARNEY For God's sakes, Jeanette, why are you doing this? Is there something about Thelma you know that I don't? Is there something about her I should know that you're not telling me? I'll find out sooner or later,

so you might as well tell me now. (*He points a threatening finger at her*) You hear me, Jeanette? I demand to know about *Thelma!*

JEANETTE (*Stares at BARNEY a few seconds*) Thelma is the only gentle, loving and decent woman I've ever met. She is unapproachable and incapable of deception. She is the epitome of decency. And the fact that you could doubt her is an act of indecency on your part. You are not a decent human being. Neither am I because I'm here with you, knowing what Thelma is. Neither is Mel, because he drove me to it. We are not decent people, Barney. Only Thelma is. But she thinks you're the most decent one of us all, so that makes her an idiot in my eyes. There are only indecent people or idiots in this world because that's all I ever see. And that's how I spend most of my day, thinking about things like that. Is it any wonder I take Digilene?

BARNEY (*Falls back in his chair, exhausted. He shakes his head*) I swear, I have never been so depressed in all my life.

JEANETTE I think my analyst has an opening Thursday afternoon.

BARNEY Is it true, Jeanette? Am I really so terrible? Are we *all* so terrible?

JEANETTE Do you know what the rate of literacy is in the United States? Eighty-six percent. Do you know how many married people have committed adultery? Eighty-seven percent. This is the only country in the world that has more cheaters than readers.

BARNEY I never thought of myself like this. I never thought of anybody like this.

JEANETTE You should see what it's like *without* Digilene.

BARNEY No. No, listen, Jeanette. I don't buy it. We're not indecent, we're not unloving. We're human. That's what we are, Jeanette. *human!*

JEANETTE If I were to tell you stories about people you know, people you respect, you would get sick to your stomach right here on this carpet.

BARNEY I'm not interested in other people. It's no concern of mine.

JEANETTE You don't see what's going on around you? The lies, the deceit. The stinking, sordid affairs that are going on in motels, in offices, in little German cars.

BARNEY Jeanette, you can't go on like this. You've got to look at the brighter side.

JEANETTE (*Fighting back tears*) Do you know Charlotte Korman, big, red-headed, buxom woman, her husband is the Mercedes-Benz dealer in Wantagh? (*BARNEY nods*) Mel doesn't like her. He doesn't want me to see her. He doesn't want her to be my friend, doesn't want her to come to our house; he can't stand Charlotte Korman.

BARNEY So?

JEANETTE He's been having an affair with her for eight months! I had to stop seeing her three times a week so *he* could see her four times a week. These are the times we live in, Barney.

BARNEY Listen, Jeanette, maybe you're wrong. Maybe it's just your imagination. Your whole outlook's a little distorted lately. You must admit you're even having trouble tasting food.

JEANETTE You know what my proof is? He told me. Two o'clock in the morning, he leans over, taps me on the shoulder and says, "I've had an affair with Charlotte Korman." Who asked him? When he tapped me on the shoulder in the middle of the night I thought he wanted *me!* You know what it is to wake up from a sound sleep with no eyelashes and a dry mouth and hear that your husband is getting it from a woman you're not allowed to see for lunch? And you know *why* he told me, Barney? He explained it to me. We're living in a new guiltless society. You can

do anything you want as long as you're honest about it. Aren't we lucky to be living in such a civilized age? In the old days I would have gone to my grave *ignorant* of the wonderful and beautiful knowledge that my husband was spending his afternoons humping Charlotte Korman! . . . When he told me, I didn't say a word. I went down to the kitchen and made myself a cream cheese and jelly sandwich on date-nut bread. And that was the last time in eight months that I tasted food . . . I estimate, going four times a week, I should be through with Doctor Margolies in another year. And then, when we both think I'm ready, I'm going to get in my car and drive off the Verrazano Bridge. In the meantime, I'm very depressed. Excuse me, Barney. Nothing personal, but I don't think we're going to have our affair.

BARNEY Where are you going?

JEANETTE Where's anyone going?

BARNEY Please, not yet.

JEANETTE (*Walks over to the desk and gets her pocketbook*) Some good time you had, heh, Barney? A barrel of laughs, right? I think my eight point two is down to a three or a four.

BARNEY I'm not indecent, Jeanette.

JEANETTE Don't start again, Barney. I only got one Digilene left.

(*She's at the door*)

BARNEY Foolish, stupid, maybe, but I'm not indecent.

JEANETTE (*Hand on the door*) Have it your way.

BARNEY *Don't leave!* Don't leave until you say I am not indecent. It's important to me, Jeanette.

JEANETTE You want me to lie? You're not indecent. We're a terrific bunch of people.

BARNEY (*Begins to fume*) All right! All right, we're all no good. We're all indecent, unfeeling, unloving, rot-

ten human beings. Sick, monstrous, disgusting people, all of us. You don't know the half of it. You haven't the slightest idea how filthy and ugly I really am deep inside. You think you're the first woman I ever had up here? Ha! You want to hear about Elaine, a woman of Polish persuasion I picked up in my own restaurant? A drinking, smoking, coughing, married woman who practically begged me to rip her clothes off . . . And you know what happened? *Nothing*, Jeanette. Nothing happened. Because I was looking for something beautiful, something decent. You want to hear about Bobbi, a psycho unemployed night club singer who had her dog kidnapped by the Beverly Hills police and sleeps with a Nazi vocal coach? I sat there with her smoking marijuana and singing popular songs of the day . . . And you know what happened? *Nothing*, Jeanette. *Nothing* happened. Because I was looking for something beautiful, something decent . . . And then I invited you. A woman who grabbed me in her kitchen last Thursday night and physically pinned me down on the table. I had mayonnaise stains on my back when I got home. And when you get here, what do you do? You sit there taking pills and holding on to your goddamned pocketbook all day. And again, *nothing* happened, Jeanette. *Nothing*. Because I was looking for something beautiful, something decent. Well, I'm through, damn it. I'm through looking for something beautiful and decent because *it doesn't exist*. You're right, Jeanette, we're no damned good, all of us. There are no decent, gentle, loving people left in the world. (*He advances toward her*) We're depraved, lustful, disgusting monsters, all of us. (*He pushes a chair out of his way*) But if we're guilty, Jeanette, then let's at least commit the crime. If we're depraved, let's see a little depravity. (*He is moving toward her; she backs away*) If we're indecent, then let's see a couple of terrific indecencies! **COME HERE, JEANETTE!**

JEANETTE Barney, get out of my way.

BARNEY Who do you think you're fooling around with here, Jeanette? Some kid? Some scared amateur? I'm a pro, baby, I know the ropes.

JEANETTE Barney, stop it, I don't think this is funny.  
BARNEY (*Stalking her*) I could tell you stories that happened in a motel with a Mexican that would make your teeth curl.

JEANETTE Get away from me, Barney, I'm not kidding.

BARNEY You want to hear language? You want to hear words? SCREW! ASSHOLE! Come on, Jeanette, let's hear a few!

JEANETTE Barney, stop it. Get away from me, I want to go, Barney. I'm not kidding.

BARNEY Kidding? Who the hell is kidding? I'm *dead serious*, Jeanette! Who do you think you are, coming on like that in the kitchen the other night and then coming up here to tell me your troubles. I'm not interested in your troubles. I want your flesh, not your heartbreaking stories.

JEANETTE Oh, my God, you must be out of your head. What's the matter with you, Barney?

BARNEY Nothing's the matter with *me*, sweetheart. I'm with it! I'm *now*! I'm here where it's happening, Jeanette, where the hell are you? Now, are you going to take off that dress or do I rip it off with my fingers?

JEANETTE Barney, stop it, I'm scared to death. You're not like this, Barney, I know you're not like this.

BARNEY No? Then tell me. Tell me what I'm really like.

JEANETTE You're quiet. You're intelligent.

BARNEY Really? And what else? Let me hear it, Jeanette, what else?

JEANETTE (*Backing away as BARNEY tosses furniture aside*) You're not mean. I've never seen you do a mean thing in your life. (*She begins to whimper*) Barney, you're scaring me.

BARNEY Quiet, intelligent . . . More, more. I wanna hear more.

JEANETTE You're kind. You're the kindest man I know. Please let me go, Barney.  
(*She is crying*)

BARNEY It's not enough, dammit. You'll stay in this room until your pocketbook rots. I want to hear the rest, Jeanette.

JEANETTE You're kind and good and intelligent . . .

BARNEY (*A real Gestapo officer*) You *said* intelligent. I already *heard* intelligent. No repeats allowed, Jeanette. I want to hear a *new* word. One you haven't said yet. Come on, Jeanette, you can say it! What else am I?

JEANETTE Decent! You're decent! You *are*, Barney!

BARNEY Aha! Decent. That's the one I wanted. Decent and what else?

JEANETTE . . . and gentle.

BARNEY And gentle. And what else?

JEANETTE . . . and loving . . .

BARNEY *Loving!* Decent and gentle and loving? But how can I be, Jeanette? You said no one is.

JEANETTE You are, Barney. Just you.

BARNEY And Thelma?

JEANETTE And Thelma.

BARNEY That's two. So if there's two there could be more, wouldn't you say that, Jeanette?

JEANETTE I don't know. I don't know.

BARNEY Think, Jeanette. Think. There's gotta be one more. Can't you think of one more?

JEANETTE No. No, I can't. There are no more. (*She is sobbing*) Mell Mell I want Mel . . .

BARNEY Why? Why do you want Mel?

BARNEY I do. And deep down, so do you.

JEANETTE I want him, I need him . . .  
BARNEY Because you love him, Jeanette?

JEANETTE Yes! . . . Yes!

BARNEY How can you love anyone who isn't decent and gentle and loving?

JEANETTE He is. He is. I don't care what he's done. He is! Mel! Mel!

BARNEY (*With sincerity*) That's three. I knew you could come up with it, Jeanette.  
(*She sits there awbile, quietly sobbing.* BARNEY *puts his arm around her*)

JEANETTE What's happened to us, Barney? What's happened to the world? . . . I can't keep up with it.

BARNEY (*Shrugs*) There's no sense denying it, Jeanette. It's changing.

JEANETTE (*Looks at bim*) In London, I've read about it. In New York, I've seen it. I never expected it in Great Neck.

BARNEY You okay? (*She nods.* *He helps her up*) You want to compose yourself again?

JEANETTE It'll take me the rest of my life. Barney, swear to me that you'll never breathe a word to a living soul—

BARNEY May I have a coronary occlusion in my doctor's office. Stop worrying, Jeanette. You want me to get you a taxi?

JEANETTE (*Shakes her head "no"*) Someone'll see us together—probably Charlotte Korman.

BARNEY I feel like such a louse. Do you hate me for what I've done, Jeanette?

JEANETTE (*Looks at bim*) Hate you . . . No, Barney.

BARNEY See you Thursday night for dinner?

JEANETTE You really believe it, don't you, Barney? That we're not all sick and rotten. You actually believe that some of us are decent, gentle and loving.

(*She leaves.* BARNEY *closes the door.* *He turns back into the room and surveys the wreckage of strewn furniture.* *He begins to replace the chairs and things in their proper places, when he stops and looks at his watch.* *An idea strikes bim.* *He crosses to the phone and puts his hand on the receiver.* *He thinks a moment, decides to go through with it, and picks up the receiver and dials.* *He waits, then*)

BARNEY (*Into the phone*) . . . Hello, Thelma? . . . What are you doing? . . . You busy? . . . Listen, honey, I was thinking, why don't you meet me this afternoon, we could do something . . . Sure, now, it takes you ten minutes to get here . . . No, not in the restaurant . . . In my mother's apartment . . . No, she didn't invite us to dinner, I just want you to meet me here . . . Thelma, don't be so stubborn, can't you meet me in my mother's apartment . . . ?

(*The curtain begins to fall*)

*Curtain*