

Half the Rent

By

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Characters

T.J., male; late twenties; works at Steinman Rare Books.

SUSAN BAILEY, late twenties; works at Steinman Rare Books.

ED, late twenties; a Caucasian funk-hipster wannabe.

MS. STEINMAN, late fifties; owns Steinman Rare Books.

JAMIE, male; late twenties; works at a deli counter.

ASHLEY, early twenties; a stripper/model.

2 STAGEHANDS, dressed in suits.

Synopsis

T.J. is in the middle of a quarter-life crisis. He hates his job at Steinman rare books; his ultra-feminist boss emasculates him daily in front of his coworker and love interest, Susan. When he thinks life can't get worse, his roommate moves out suddenly leaving him two weeks to find a new place to live. As he drowns his sorrows in a local pub, a chance encounter seems to provide his salvation: a beautiful, upscale apartment on Rittenhouse Square for relative peanuts. There's only one catch: he must share the apartment with an adult entertainment website.

Production History

2004, Torchbearers of Plays and Players Theater, Philadelphia, PA.

ACT I

Scene 1

(At rise, TJ enters an empty stage. He has the look of a man who is totally lost, has no idea who he is, where he is, or what's going on. The two STAGEHANDS enter, one with a rolling desk chair that he uses to take TJ's legs out from under him so that he falls back into the chair; he wheels him upstage right. The STAGEHANDS then build the Steinman Rare Books set around TJ. They put a table with a computer on it in front of him; they place a second desk, chair, and computer right center; on the left of TJ's desk they place a small table and a radio. When they exit, STEINMAN and SUSAN enter. SUSAN carries a binder.)

STEINMAN

All right, read it to me again.

SUSAN

(reading from binder) *Three Guineas* by Virginia Woolf, 1938. First edition.

STEINMAN

Eleven hundred dollars. Next.

SUSAN

(reading) *A Room of One's Own*. Virginia Woolf, 1929. Limited first edition signed by the author in purple ink. One of four hundred ninety-two copies.

STEINMAN

Eight thousand eight hundred dollars.

SUSAN

Any more?

STEINMAN

That'll be all for now. I want you to focus your energies on those two books. You must get them by any means necessary.

SUSAN

Yes, Ms. Steinman.

STEINMAN

Marc Jacobson and his boys will no doubt make a play for them as well. They are the most unscrupulous of men, and we must beat them at their own game. Whatever conniving tricks they pull, we must also be prepared to pull. To whatever depths they sink, we must be willing to sink even lower. Is that understood?

SUSAN

Yes, Ms. Steinman.

STEINMAN

Good. How are we doing on sales?

SUSAN

Very well. Michael Moore called last week.

STEINMAN

The filmmaker?

SUSAN

Yes. He bought our entire Karl Marx collection; I threw in a copy of *It Takes a Village* for free--thought he could use it.

STEINMAN

That a girl, Susan. My, how you've come a long way. When I look at you, I see myself when I was younger.

SUSAN

(Unenthusiastic, insulted) Really?

STEINMAN

Yes, minus the dress, bra, and cosmetics. Oh, why won't you wear a nice business suit like I've asked?

SUSAN

I do, when I'm at an auction or when I meet with a buyer.

STEINMAN

It's your state of mind that worries me. You are dooming yourself to a life of second-class citizenship looking the way you do.

SUSAN

It's just a little eyeliner and some lipstick. And I like wearing dresses. Those suits with the shoulder pads...they're so...unflattering.

TJ

You know, she's right. They are very unflattering--

STEINMAN

(To TJ) You shut up! I'll deal with you momentarily. That catalogue you wrote reads like VCR instructions. *(To SUSAN)* And as for you, Ms. Calvin Klein, have you any idea how many women have suffered throughout the ages just to give you the right to wear pants?

SUSAN

I know--

STEINMAN

You should wear them with pride!

SUSAN

I...well, I know, but I don't understand how it really matters now.

STEINMAN

Everything matters, especially now. That's what the girls of your generation don't understand. Every woman who goes out dressed like a prostitute erases all the hard-won progress we women have made over the years.

SUSAN

But--

STEINMAN

You women with your belly-shirts, and pierced navels, and your thongs. *(Beat)* Susan, do you wear a thong?

SUSAN

Ms. Steinman?

STEINMAN

(Beat) You know, I tried on a thong once.

TJ

Can I go home?

STEINMAN

Most uncomfortable day in my life! That torture device rode all the way up into my--

SUSAN

Ms. Steinman! *(Beat)* You're right. I will wear a business suit from now on.

STEINMAN

Of course I'm right. We'll set time aside next week and I'll take you shopping. Your taste in clothing may appall my sensibilities, but it is correctable. *(Turning to TJ)* Unlike other things I could name. This catalogue is supposed to make people want to buy our books, not scoop up dog-doo with it. You describe the greatest works of literature in the Western canon with all the passion of a eunuch!

TJ

I know, you're right. I'm soulless, just like you said last week--

STEINMAN

This *(shaking the catalogue)* is completely unacceptable.

(She rips up the copy.)

STEINMAN (cont'd)

The catalogue is due in two weeks, and if you don't produce something that knocks the Shirley Temple out of me, you'll be out on your ear faster than you can say "folio manuscript." Understand?

TJ

Yes, Ms. Steinman.

STEINMAN

And wear something more colorful, for god's sake. You're so drab. I look at you and I have to spend an hour in front of a sunlamp to recover.

(She turns to leave, and then turns back.)

STEINMAN (cont'd)

And another thing. Just so you two don't get any ideas of an office romance--

SUSAN

Oh, never!

(TJ looks disappointed.)

STEINMAN

I'll remind you of our strict company policy prohibiting such hanky-panky. *(To TJ)* Got that, Mr. Helper?

TJ

Loud and clear.

STEINMAN

Good.

(STEINMAN exits.)

SUSAN

Thanks for trying to help.

TJ

I was some help.

SUSAN

Thanks anyway.

TJ

(Beat) She's so hard on you.

SUSAN

She just, you know, doesn't want me to waste my potential and all that.

TJ

I see. *(Beat)* Listen...they're showing "Gone With the Wind" at the Prince Music Theater tonight--

STEINMAN

Susan!

TJ

--and I don't know how you feel about Southern dramas--

SUSAN

Coming! *(To TJ)* What?

TJ

(Beat) Nothing.

SUSAN

Oh.

(SUSAN exits. TJ looks straight ahead, assuming his appearance at the beginning of the scene. The STAGEHANDS enter and strike everything but the small table and radio. They place another chair

next to TJ, a coffee table in front of him, and an artificial plant upstage right. One of the STAGEHANDS turns the radio on before exiting.)

Act I, Scene 2

(TJ and Jamie's apartment.)

RADIO

Calling on all you single guys. Looking for something to do this Friday night? Look no further. Come to the Sexadelphia.com wet T-shirt contest, only at Max's! Five hundred dollars goes to the winner, and yes it is open to the public. So round up all of your little Ms. Manners, all of your prim and proper princesses with a little devil inside, and tell them to take a walk on the wild side. Then hang out afterward with the hottest girls in the Sexadelphia area, seen only on Sexadelphia.com.

(Music plays. JAMIE enters. He wears an apron and other attire worn by someone who works at a deli counter. He carries a bottle of wine and a plastic grocery bag. He sings along to the radio.)

JAMIE

TJ, my good man!

TJ

Hey, Jamie--

JAMIE

Come dance with me!

TJ

What?

(JAMIE grabs TJ and dances him around the room.)

TJ (cont'd)

What are you doing?

JAMIE

I'm trying to dance with you.

TJ

Why?

JAMIE

Oh, let me lead!

(They dance a little more and end with JAMIE dipping TJ. TJ rises and turns off the radio.)

TJ

You're in a good mood.

JAMIE

Yes, and I wish I could say the same about you.

TJ

What happened? *(Sarcastically)* Did they finally diversify your product line of meats?

JAMIE

Ha! That'll be the day. Those fools think *they* know how to run a deli counter. But enough about my career--tonight we celebrate! Tonight we will drink the sweet nectar of the vine *(holding up the wine bottle)* and feast upon the mold of the dank, dark caves of France *(holding up the bag)*.

TJ

What are we celebrating?

JAMIE

Wonderful, wonderful news.

TJ

What?

JAMIE

I'm getting married!

TJ

You're getting married?

JAMIE

I'm getting married!

TJ

To who?

JAMIE

To whom.

TJ

To whom?

JAMIE
To whom do you think?

TJ
To Tina?

JAMIE
Of course.

TJ
But you guys just met.

JAMIE
We've been dating three months.

TJ
Yeah.

JAMIE
That's plenty of time to heed the call of fate. My grandparents were engaged after only two months of dating, and their marriage lasted fifty-four years.

TJ
You said they had a horrible marriage.

JAMIE
But it had such longevity.

TJ
You're serious?

JAMIE
Oh, I am.

TJ
(stammering) I don't know what to say.

JAMIE
How about congratulations.

TJ
(Beat) Oh...yeah. Of course, I'm sorry. Congratulations.

(TJ gives JAMIE an awkward hug.)

TJ (cont'd)

I'm sure you guys will be very happy. I don't know Tina very well, but you sound happy...especially at three a.m.

JAMIE

Have we been keeping you up? I do apologize. We can't keep our hands off each other. That's how I know it's for real.

TJ

Yeah, and you did replace my air mattress.

JAMIE

You're so understanding. I'm really going to miss you.

TJ

Yeah, I'll really miss you too. *(Beat)* What do you mean you're going to miss me? Why will you miss me?

JAMIE

Because I'm moving out in two weeks.

TJ

You're doing what?

JAMIE

Tina made settlement on our little love nest today. It was then that I asked for her hand in marriage.

TJ

You're moving out?

JAMIE

Yes.

TJ

In two weeks?

JAMIE

Isn't it wonderful?

TJ

Tell me you're joking.

JAMIE

Oh, love is no laughing matter.

TJ

I can't afford to stay here by myself!

JAMIE

Yes, I know. I do feel terrible about it, but say you understand and that you're happy for me.

TJ

No, I don't understand.

JAMIE

It's all very simple. A couple months ago she approached the subject of co-habitation--

TJ

You've been planning to move out for a couple of months and you're telling me now?

JAMIE

I wanted my engagement to be a surprise.

TJ

Well congratulations--I'm surprised!

JAMIE

Surely you understand why I must go. A newlywed couple needs their own place.

TJ

I can't believe this. What am I gonna do?

JAMIE

You'll have to find another roommate, I suppose.

TJ

Like who?

JAMIE

Whom.

TJ

All of our friends are either married or engaged. This is probably the worst time in my life to find a roommate. In a couple years it'd be different--people will be getting divorced.

JAMIE

You could put an add in the paper.

TJ

After what happened last year?

JAMIE

True. Identity theft is a hideous crime.

TJ

I hate to say it, but you're really screwing me.

JAMIE

Must you make this all about you?

TJ

Oh, forgive me for being so selfish! All right then--what about you? Why do you have to get *married*?

JAMIE

Tina is getting up there in years--she's thirty--and she wants to start a family as soon as possible. Having a family and being a mother have always been the most important things to her.

TJ

Doesn't she have a Ph.D. in physics?

JAMIE

And an MBA, yes.

TJ

(Beat) I don't get it.

JAMIE

Neither do I, but who can question the workings of the human heart? Besides, it'll finally give me a chance to throw myself into my career.

(TJ gives JAMIE an up and down and then sits down at the table.)

TJ

But I love this apartment.

JAMIE

I know. I'm sorry.

TJ

My job sucks, my love life is a joke; this apartment is the one thing I have going for me and you're telling me I have to leave?

JAMIE

Don't think of it that way. Think of this as a perturbation, an event to shake up the stagnant existence you call a life.

(TJ slowly looks up at JAMIE.)

JAMIE (cont'd)

What I mean is, change is good, even when it seems bad. For all you know, in a couple short weeks you'll move right next door to the girl who will become the great love of your life. Then you can know the elation, the unsurpassed joy that I feel.

TJ

You're consoling me with talk of fate? Life is about what you choose. For instance, I *chose* to live here.

JAMIE

But now you have to leave. You didn't choose that. It sounds like fate to me.

TJ

(A pause and then explosion) You did this!

JAMIE

Maybe it's fate that moves my hand for your benefit. You have to admit, you can't go on this way much longer.

TJ

What way?

JAMIE

(With a sweeping motion of his hand)
This way.

TJ

What are you talking about?

JAMIE

TJ--you're depressed.

TJ

(Beat) Thanks for the news flash.

JAMIE

You've been this way for a long time. I've watched it get progressively worse.

TJ

Yeah, well...

JAMIE

And I know what your problem is: you're lonely and uncertain.

TJ

Who are you, Dr. Phil?

JAMIE

I'm the person who knows you better than anyone. *(Beat)* Sometimes, when Tina and I are in bed, consummating our love in its physical form, I think of you, sitting in your bedroom, watching TV or reading, alone, with no one to love you.

TJ

You think of me when you're having sex?

JAMIE

Sometimes. I want you to be happy, as happy as I am. Why don't you ever go out on a date?

TJ

A what?

JAMIE

A date.

TJ

What's that?

JAMIE

Be serious.

TJ

What do you want me to say? I go out on dates...and then I come home alone, drink six beers--I'm quite consistent.

JAMIE

And why is that?

TJ

I don't know. I don't have anything in common with the women I meet. I was born in the wrong century or something.

JAMIE

What about that girl at work? You seem to get along with her. What's her name?

TJ

What girl at work? You mean Susan?

JAMIE

Yes, that's the one.

TJ

Oh...Susan's great, but...we're just friends.

JAMIE

Really? Then why do you feel like you're in freefall, like someone has just thrown you from an airplane, every time you see her in the morning? (*Acting it out*) And why do you sometimes envision that terrorists take you and your coworkers hostage and select her for the first execution, but then you volunteer to go in her place, and you do, despite her pleas, despite how she clutches your leg and begs you not to go, but then you fight off the terrorists and save her with guns blazing, but not before you fall in a hail of bullets and hit the ground, mortally wounded and in your death throws...and then she picks up your bloodied head from the floor and holds you in her arms, and you look up at her and manage a tortured smile, and the world closes in around that beautiful face...as you brush away an errant strand of hair and feel her hot tears fall down upon your lips.

TJ

(*Beat*) You read my journal?

JAMIE

Yes, last night. It's simply fascinating.

TJ

I hate you.

JAMIE

I am amazed by what's in that head of yours. Frightened at times, but definitely amazed.

TJ

I guess there are less obvious confessions. She's the only reason I still work there, as pathetic as that sounds. But it's not just Susan or women or being lonely. It's something else. I'm not sure what.

(JAMIE takes out TJ's journal.)

JAMIE

(Reading) Could it be how more and more you feel that your masculinity is receding and that there's a global conspiracy to turn you gay?

TJ

(Beat) Don't try to change the subject.

(TJ snatches the journal from JAMIE.)

TJ (cont'd)

Let's get back to you breaking our lease and stranding me with nowhere to live.

JAMIE

You're right. We'll take care of the mundane matters first. Foremost, I want to help you. I'll do whatever it takes to make this transition as easy as possible. That's why I already took care of the utilities.

TJ

What do you mean?

JAMIE

I took the liberty of canceling the gas, phone, and electricity.

TJ

When?

(Lights go out.)

JAMIE

Earlier today.

TJ

Thanks.

JAMIE

I just want to help. Is there anything else I can do?

TJ

I don't think so.

ACT I

Scene 3

(Wolfgang's Pub. At rise, TJ sits his chair from the previous scene. The STAGEHANDS strike the furniture near TJ and replace it with a bar; they put an empty beer bottle on the bar. They also arrange the set for the apartment in the black as TJ tries to order a drink.)

TJ

Bartender!

(Unsuccessful, he lowers his hand, then raises it again.)

TJ (cont'd)

Umm...bartender...sir?

(He sinks back onto his stool. He takes out a twenty and suavely hangs it over the bar.)

TJ (cont'd)

(with a nod, then suavely) Bartender?

(One of the STAGEHANDS takes the twenty as he exits.)

TJ (cont'd)

Hey!

(TJ sits back onto his stool and takes a sip. ED enters and takes a seat at the bar. After a few beats, ED recognizes TJ.)

ED

Teej?

TJ

Ed?

ED

Yeah, dawg!

TJ

No one's called me Teej in years.

ED

Damn, bro. It's good to see you!

(ED gives TJ a big hug.)

TJ

Yeah, it's good to see you too. It's been awhile.

ED

It's been a goddamn long while.

TJ

I like the dreds and the cape.

ED

Just trying to get back to my roots, you know?

TJ

Of Northern Jersey?

ED

(laughs) I'm just representing and keeping it real. How you doing? Looks like your glass is half empty. Shit, looks like it's all empty.

TJ

Apparently I don't know the secret handshake that gets me another beer in this place.

ED

Is that right? *(Toward offstage)* Yo! Maflizzle! Maflizzle shizzle!

(A STAGEHAND promptly arrives and places two pints of beer in front of them and exits.)

TJ

How'd you do that?

ED

I don't know, man. I just don't know.

(TJ and ED clink glasses and each takes a drink.)

ED (cont'd)

(Smiling) So what's happenin' with my main man Timothy James?

TJ

He's looking for a new apartment.

ED

Cool. Any luck?

TJ

No. I just started. I found out yesterday I have two weeks to move out of my place.

ED

You getting evicted?

TJ

My roommate's getting married and moving out. He just sprung it on me.

ED

Didn't give you much time, did he?

TJ

No he didn't, *and* he's marrying a girl he's known for only three months.

ED

Three months? Shit! Couldn't he just tap that ass and be done with it? That's what I do, man. I'm out the doe in the morning...adios muchach-HO! Why'd he have to marry the bitch?

TJ

He's in love. He says this is the one.

ED

Yeah, I've said that before but it's always been like "this is the one...that gives me the clap." *(laughs)* You know what I'm saying? *(seriously)* By the way, you been to the clinic lately? They've really beautified it: put some wicker magazine racks in the waiting room and some Ansel Adams posters and shit...well anyway, I can't believe y'all gonna be homeless.

TJ

Me neither. He's put me in a tight spot.

ED

Sounds like he screwed yo ass to the wall is what he did. Is that why you look so down?

TJ

I guess. Nothing's going right for me lately.

ED

Yeah. Shit, man, it sounds like you got some serious living anom-o-lations.

TJ

You can say...whatever it is you just said, again. If I don't find something in the next couple weeks I'll have to put everything in storage and move back in with my parents.

ED

I met them once. You're folks are great, man.

TJ

You try living with them. Plus, they still...well, let's say they've rekindled their sex life with a vengeance.

ED

Good for them. I knew they was cool.

TJ

Yeah, it was real cool when I surprised them in the living room.

ED

For real?

TJ

They forgot they invited me to dinner.

ED

Damn. I bet you weren't expecting to see meatballs on the menu.

TJ

I should sue the makers of Viagra is what I should do. And I can just hear my mother nagging me already. I wouldn't last a day.

ED

I can see why yo depressed an' shit.

TJ

It's everything--my job, women...everything.

ED

I'm sorry, man. If I had any money I'd buy you these drinks.

TJ

(Beat) Thanks, I appreciate that.

ED

(lengthy pause) Wait a goddamn minute!

TJ

What?

ED

I think I just found the answer to your prayers, Diggory Venn.

TJ

What prayers?

ED

To your crib-o-matic, crib-o-phobic, hydro-laundramatic dilemma. Shit, I got it figured!

(ED pulls a business card from his wallet and hands it to TJ.)

TJ

(reading) Sexadelphia dot com? What's this?

ED

It's some side work I've been doing.

TJ

(examining the card) Who are they? They're really hot.

ED

Those are my girls, man. I've been going to these hotel rooms and taking their pictures and putting them up on that website. The one on the right is Ashley, and that one's Jessica, and that one's--

TJ

You're an internet pornographer?

ED

Hold on, Spaz-o-metric! It ain't porn. It's just these funky, kinda of groovy pictures of chicks posing in lingerie.

TJ
Just lingerie?

ED
Yeah.

TJ
They're not naked?

ED
Man, I wish.

TJ
(*looking at the card*) They're really beautiful.

ED
Yeah, they all ripped an' shit. Real friendly too. Just your average, all-American girls putting themselves through school.

TJ
But what does this have to do with me?

ED
Huh?

TJ
These pictures you take for the website--what does it have to do with me?

ED
Check this out: (*conspiratorially*) the hotel rooms got too expensive, see?...

TJ
Yeah?...

ED
So my boss rented this totally phat crib downtown to do the shoots...

TJ
Yeah?...

ED
What I'm thinking is, you could just live there and split the rent with him.

TJ

Where?

ED

In the apartment where we do the shoots.

TJ

Let me get this straight. You want me...

ED

Yeah?...

TJ

To live in an apartment...

ED

Yeah?...

TJ

Where you take pictures of these girls in lingerie?

ED

Yeah.

TJ

(Beat) Get the hell out of here!

ED

What?

TJ

(chuckles) You are too much.

ED

Come on, dawg. It's a win-win. You need a place, he's trying to cut costs.

TJ

You're serious?

ED

Like a man who's been told he has herpes.

TJ

How's that gonna work?

ED

Easy. All you'd have to do is let us use it when we need it, and you get to live in this bling-bling crib for half the rent. The boss is already looking for someone to move in.

TJ

How bling-bling?

ED

Shit, bling-a-ding-ding-dong bling! Bling ain't the word! It's right on the Square. It's called The Rittenhouse.

TJ

(musingly) I've heard of that place.

ED

Plus, you get the finest booty in town parading through yo crib like you was in a real-life Victoria's Secret catalogue.

TJ

What's the rent?

ED

I think about six hundred a month.

TJ

That's less than I pay now. How often do you use it?

ED

Couple times a week, tops.

TJ

When, at what times?

ED

It varies, man. Don't worry. If I were you I'd do this like Brutus. Just picture it: a place with a free garage--

TJ

It has a garage?

ED

Yeah, and a real cool doorman.

TJ

I've never had a doorman.

(Stage lights come up on the apartment as ED describes it.)

ED

It's got high ceilings, and lots of natural light pouring in, especially in the morning.

TJ

I like natural light.

ED

Dig it--

(ED and TJ walk through the fully lighted stage as ED describes the apartment.)

ED (cont'd)

You walk out from one of your two bedrooms after a great night's sleep on a California king mattress into your big, badass kitchen. You got a fresh cup of coffee in your hand.

TJ

What kind?

ED

Whatever kind you want--there's a Starbucks right in the lobby. You walk into the living room and slide on past a sixty inch flat panel plasma HDTV for your viewing pleasure. Then you walk over to the ten foot high windows and gaze out on the park to watch all the fine-looking MILFs walkin' their doggies. Yeah.

TJ

And it only costs six hundred a month?

ED

That's right.

TJ

This sounds too good to be true.

ED

It gets better.

TJ

How?

ED

Because you're not alone.

(ASHLEY emerges from the bedroom wearing a silk robe. She walks toward TJ, puts her arms around him, and kisses him on the neck.)

ASHLEY

Mmm...good morning.

TJ

(To ED) How did this happen?

ED

Easy. You live here, and that gives you a certain status with the talent. Plus, girls like Ashley have gotten to know you and have been won over by your charms.

TJ

Not only have I never been with a women this beautiful, I've resigned myself to the fact that I never will.

ED

Well that's all gonna change. You're about to start the new phase of your life. The Sexadelphia phase.

TJ

That sounds really trashy.

ED

Yeah.

TJ

(snapping out of his fantasy) Wait. No. I'm not doing this to meet women.

(ASHLEY exits.)

TJ (cont'd)

God, I'm not that naïve.

(TJ walks back to the bar. ED follows.)

TJ (cont'd)

I'm not the kind of guy who gets lingerie models, OK?

(Stage goes to black except for the bar.)

TJ (cont'd)

I need a place to live, one I can afford--preferably a nice one. That's all I want.

ED

(chuckles) That's all anybody wants. You just described the American dream, my man. All right, the booty aside, what do you think of my modest proposal?

TJ

(Beat) All you do in the apartment is take pictures of girls in lingerie?

ED

No, I take pictures of *ultra-hottie* girls in lingerie.

TJ

And you only use the apartment a couple times a week?

ED

Tops. Some weeks we don't use it at all.

TJ

And it isn't a porn site?

ED

(long beat) No.

TJ

You're sure?

ED

(long beat) Of course I'm sure.

TJ

Ed, promise me it isn't a porn site.

ED

It ain't a porn site, dawg, what'd I just say? Check it out for yourself. Our name is our address an' shit.

TJ

How do I know your boss won't change his mind and throw me out a month from now?

ED

We'll put you on the lease. *(Beat)* Sound good?

TJ

It sounds like a beautiful place in a great location.

ED

It is. Not to mention you're a grown man whose alternative is moving back in with his folks.

TJ

(Wide-eyed) Yeah.

ED

No man should see his folks gettin' down like Nappy Brown. So what do you think?

TJ

I don't know. It's so...*not me* to do something like this.

ED

Think--this could be the new phase of your life, a time when you start doing things you wouldn't normally do.

(Lights up on the apartment. TJ and ED walk center stage. TJ looks around in awe. ASHLEY enters.)

ASHLEY

Ready, Eddie?

ED

Oh, yeah, baby. Hey TJ, do you mind if we take a few pictures while you look around?

TJ

Uh, no! Not at all.

(ASHLEY removes her robe to reveal sexy lingerie. She poses tastefully before the camera. ED snaps a picture.)

ED

That's it. Now turn your head a little to the left. *(snaps another)* Damn, you are beautiful, girl. *(snaps another.)* All right, now just lean against the chair a bit. And look up...just a little. I want the light to catch your eyes. *(snaps another)* Beautiful.

TJ

Hey Ed?

(ED walks to him.)

ED

Yeah?

TJ

I'll take it.

*(STAGEHANDS enter. ED and ASHLEY exit.
STAGEHANDS set up stage for Steinman Rare Books
set. TJ sits in his chair. Before exiting, one of the
STAGEHANDS raises the corners of TJ's mouth in a
smile and turns on the radio.)*

Act I

Scene 4

RADIO

Calling on all you single guys. Haven't had a date in awhile? Tired of spending all your money on some girl who isn't a sure thing? Then come to the Sexadelphia.com VIP party this Friday night, only at Max's. Hang out with Ashley, Jessica, Britney, Christina, and all your other favorite hotties seen only on Sexadelphia.com. And don't miss the midnight raffle because one lucky guy will win a date with the Sexadelphia girl of his choice. It could be you.

("Get Back" by The Beatles plays. SUSAN rushes in with a briefcase, a bag, and a couple binders.)

TJ

Good morning, Susan.

SUSAN

You're in early.

TJ

So I am. Did you have a nice weekend?

SUSAN

My weekend was many things--nice wasn't one of them.

(SUSAN opens her briefcase and searches through it.)

TJ (cont'd)

Are you OK? You look a little frazzled.

SUSAN

(fixing her hair) Oh...sorry.

TJ

You don't have to apologize.

SUSAN

Sorry.

(SUSAN goes back to her briefcase.)

TJ

So what did you do?

SUSAN

What?

TJ

This weekend?

SUSAN

I worked.

TJ

The whole time?

SUSAN

Most of it. And when I wasn't working I was thinking about working, which is worse than actually working. How about you? Did you finish the catalogue?

TJ

I did. I gave her draft number thirteen on Friday.

SUSAN

How is it?

TJ

It's my best work to date. I'm sure she'll hate it.

SUSAN

I'm sorry. *(Beat)* You know, if you ever want me to proofread anything, I'd be glad to help--

(STEINMAN enters with a pocketbook over her shoulder.)

STEINMAN

(To SUSAN, excitedly) Ah, Susan! You're here. So, did...do I hear music?

(TJ turns off the radio.)

STEINMAN (cont'd)

Did you get them?

(SUSAN reaches into her bag and pulls out two books. She hands them to STEINMAN.)

STEINMAN (cont'd)

You've done it! You've really done it! That's my girl. *(Beat)* How did you do it? Were the Jacobson boys there?

SUSAN

They were.

STEINMAN

How did you outwit them?

SUSAN

I took your advice. I used my intelligence, my cunning, my wit, *(beat)* a well-placed bomb threat...

STEINMAN

I saw it on CNN. That was you?

(SUSAN nods.)

STEINMAN (cont'd)

Bravo! That's showing them!

SUSAN

Ms. Steinman, I don't know how much longer I can go on like this.

STEINMAN

Nonsense. You're doing brilliant work. Simply brilliant.

SUSAN

I don't think I'm cut out for this job.

STEINMAN

Rubbish. I know talent when I see it. Look at all you've learned and accomplished these past few years. In that time, the Steinman Rare Books collection has grown to ten thousand titles! Make no mistake, Susan--beneath that sheepish exterior of yours lie the killer instincts of a wolf!

SUSAN

But I don't want to be a wolf.

STEINMAN

Yes you do. They're the only ones who survive.

SUSAN

This doesn't feel right. I hardly see my friends, my boyfriend and I broke up--

STEINMAN

Oh, was his little heart broken because he wasn't the center of your universe? If he was put off by the fact that you are a strong, successful woman who can stand on her own two feet, then I say good riddance!

SUSAN

I need more of my life back.

STEINMAN

(Beat) I can't allow it.

SUSAN

What?

STEINMAN

I can't allow it. Don't you see what's at stake? We need strong women now more than ever. Read the newspaper. Look at the art and music of your generation. The objectification of women is rampant again, but it's worse this time because it's veiled; it's sneaky and has disguised itself as liberation.

(TJ drinks his coffee.)

STEINMAN (cont'd)

Why, just this morning I heard the most appalling radio ad where they are planning to raffle off a woman for this thing called Sexadelphia something or other.

(TJ spits up his coffee.)

STEINMAN (cont'd)

Having a drinking problem today, Timothy?

TJ

Just went down the wrong pipe.

STEINMAN

I can't help but notice you're in nice and early for a change.

TJ

The early bird catches the worm.

STEINMAN

Indeed it does. I do love a good cliché. "The early bird catches the worm"...that must make you the early *worm*, hmm? (*wiggling her pinky*) Oh, and I proofread your latest attempt at our catalogue over the weekend. Here you are.

(STEINMAN reaches into her pocketbook and pulls out two handfuls of shredded paper and puts them on TJ's desk.)

TJ

Are the edits in red ink as usual?

(STEINMAN and TJ laugh simultaneously.)

STEINMAN

Why, Timothy--I had no idea you had such a lovely sense of humor.

TJ

Thank you.

STEINMAN

Suppress it immediately.

TJ

Don't think I can today. Here--I have something for you.

STEINMAN

(Hopefully) A letter of resignation?

(TJ hands her a piece of paper.)

TJ

A change of address form.

SUSAN

You moved?

TJ

Yup.

SUSAN

When?

TJ

This weekend.

SUSAN

You're this chipper and you spent the weekend moving? I'm usually exhausted when I move--

STEINMAN

You moved into the Rittenhouse? I don't pay you enough to live in that building. Did you rob a bank? (*saucily*) Did you find yourself a sugar momma and become her boy toy?

TJ

Not at all.

STEINMAN

Then how can you afford to live there?

TJ

How can I afford to live there?

STEINMAN

That's what I asked you.

TJ

Well I...have a roommate who...got the bigger room and is...paying more of the rent?

STEINMAN

You're a horrible liar, but I like that in an employee. Anyway, it's none of my business how you subsidize your income so long as it doesn't interfere with the substandard work you do for me.

TJ

Thank you.

STEINMAN

Of course you will have to completely rewrite the catalogue again.

TJ

Of course.

STEINMAN

Time is running out. You'll wish you were a kept man if you don't produce something acceptable this week.

TJ

I will. You can count on me.

STEINMAN

And I want you to add these two books by Virginia Woolf. They are to be our featured pieces of literature and belong on the front page with descriptions worthy of her craft. Do you know what that means?

TJ

I think I do.

STEINMAN

It means I'll write them.

TJ

I think I don't.

STEINMAN

Leave room for them on the front page and I'll take it from there.

TJ

I think I can handle it.

STEINMAN

You couldn't handle an at-a-glance Far Side calendar! *(Beat)* Oh, I know I'm rather blunt, but it is the most efficient managerial style.

TJ

Do what you think is right.

STEINMAN

I always do...uncompromisingly. And that reminds me--I have something else for you.

(STEINMAN exits and then enters with a pink sweater.)

STEINMAN (cont'd)

Here you are.

(She drapes the sweater over TJ's shoulders.)

STEINMAN (cont'd)

That should brighten up things around here.

TJ

Thanks.

STEINMAN

Now, Susan, come in the back and you'll see what I bought for you.

(STEINMAN exits.)

TJ

Does it give my face a rosy glow?

SUSAN

I'm sorry, TJ. I can't stand the way she treats you.

TJ

She just doesn't want me to waste my potential--

SUSAN

Please don't mock me.

TJ

Sorry.

SUSAN

You can't seem to do anything right. She threatens to fire you at least once a week. Why does she keep you around?

TJ

She likes her whipping boy.

SUSAN

Well I don't like it.

TJ

(cheerfully) No use crying over spilled derision.

SUSAN

You certainly have a positive attitude today. *(Beat)* What's different about you? Something's changed. I can't put my finger on it. You look almost...confident.

TJ

High on life, I guess.

SUSAN

For the love of God, why? What is it? Is it the new apartment?

TJ

Maybe.

SUSAN

I'm always completely stressed out after I move.

TJ

I had the best moving experience ever, and you should see this place, it's--well, it really is a nice apartment.

SUSAN

It can't be that nice. There must be something else. Did you have a religious experience or something?

TJ

Better. *(Beat, then leaning in closer)* Have you ever done something completely out of character?

STEINMAN (O.S.)

Susan!

SUSAN

My whole life is out of character.

(SUSAN turns to exit.)

TJ

Were you serious about helping me write the catalogue?

SUSAN

Yes I was.

TJ

(cautiously) Would you like to discuss it over a drink?

SUSAN

I...don't think that's such a good idea.

TJ

Why not?

SUSAN

(checking watch) It's eight o'clock in the morning.

TJ

Not now. I mean after work.

SUSAN

You want me to have a drink with you after work?

TJ

No!...well, yeah, but just to discuss the catalogue.

SUSAN

Can't we discuss it here?

TJ

We could, but a couple of drinks will really help get the juices flowing--the creative juices I mean...as opposed to the other...kind of...juices--could I just take that whole sentence back?

SUSAN

(smiles) I would love to help you, TJ, but I wouldn't want people to get the wrong idea.

TJ

People like who? Ms. Steinman? She'll never know. It's a little hole in the wall just down the street. It's called Wolfgang's. The beer's cheap, the bartenders never serve you...it's great.

SUSAN

I don't know.

TJ

Come on. Just relax, dawg.

SUSAN

(Beat) Did you just call me "dawg."

TJ

Did I?

(SUSAN nods.)

TJ (cont'd)

What was worse: that or the "juices" thing?

SUSAN

(chuckles) There's something really strange about you today. *(softly)* Listen, I have to work late tonight, but...maybe tomorrow? You know, just to help you with the catalogue.

TJ

Of course. It's all about the catalogue.

STEINMAN (O.S.)

Susan!

TJ

You'd better go.

SUSAN

Yeah.

(SUSAN walks slowly toward the exit and looks back just before she walks off. TJ clears his desk of both the coffee and shredded paper and exits. ED and ASHELY enter with ED snapping pictures of her as they do. ASHLEY is in a school girl outfit. The STAGEHANDS enter and set the stage for TJ's New Apartment as ED snaps pictures.)

Act I

Scene 5

(TJ's New Apartment. ED and ASHLEY are in the middle of a photo shoot.)

ED

That's it. Now get next to the chair and show me a little more thigh. Take the skirt up just a bit. Yeah, a little higher. A little more. Now look up. Woo! Girl, that is switched on!

(TJ enters with a handful of mail.)

TJ

(smiling) Hard at work?

ED

Yeah, I was just finishing up. Hey, uh, I know I didn't tell you we'd be here today, but it won't take long. Do you mind? It's all good, right?

TJ

Absolutely. Take your time.

ED

My man. *(To ASHLEY)* All right, girl. Now we're gonna break it down.

(ASHLEY poses by the chair. TJ walks stage right sorting his mail. Throughout the following exchange, ED snaps pictures as she removes her top. By the end she'll be in a bra and skirt.)

ED (cont'd)

(Quick pacing, in a crescendo) Look at me. Look right here, right at the camera. That's it. Now take the skirt up just a little higher. Yeah, like that. You've been a bad little girl, haven't you? A very bad girl who's gonna get what she deserves. You feel so dirty. So very, very dirty and you have to get clean. But how will you ever get clean? You'll have to take off those clothes, baby doll. That's it. Take it off for Daddy. Daddy's coming home and you've been such a naughty, filthy little girl. Yeah. Such a filthy little 'ho. Yes you are. You know it, don't you? You know it. That's right. Yeah, slide it up just like a filthy little whore. Yeah! Just like the disgusting little whore that you are--

TJ

Um...Ed?

ED
Yeah?

TJ
Can you come here for sec?

ED
Sure thing. *(To ASHLEY)* All right. Let's take five.

(ASHLEY sits in a chair. ED walks over to TJ.)

ED (cont'd)
Wassaaap?

TJ
I don't mean to tell you your business, but do you have to talk like that?

ED
Like what?

TJ
Like...that. The way you're talking to her.

ED
Whatcha talking 'bout?

TJ
All the stuff you're saying.

ED
What stuff?

TJ
(softly) The filthy little whore stuff. Do you really have to talk like that?

ED
(laughs) I'm just getting her in the mood. She likes it. It makes her feel sexy.

TJ
I find that hard to believe.

ED

Hey, I'd trust your expertise if it came to books, you should trust mine when it comes to the ladies. Shit, I already got me a 4.0 in nackin' tail!

TJ

Well then I guess you know what you're talking about.

ED

(chuckles) What's wrong with you? Look at you, all weirded out an' shit.

TJ

I don't know. I'm just not used to that sort of language.

ED

Don't you talk dirty to your women?

TJ

It's been so long, I can't remember what I've ever said to a woman ever.

ED

Maybe that's your problem. Things change so fast that if you're out of the game for too long you look around one day and you're like "what the fuck?"

TJ

You know, that's exactly how I feel.

ED

I know it is. And I'll let you in on another little secret: *(softly)* you're scared, dawg.

TJ

What do you mean?

ED

You're scared of women.

TJ

I'm not scared of women.

ED

Yes you are.

TJ

I'm scared of women?

ED

Petrified.

TJ

(snidely laughs) I'm scared of women?

ED

Uh-huh.

TJ

(lowers his head) You're right.

(ED embraces TJ.)

ED

I know, man. It's OK.

TJ

You don't have to do that.

(ED let's go.)

ED

Right. OK, it's cool.

TJ

I not afraid. I just don't understand them.

ED

But we fear what we don't understand.

TJ

Good point.

ED

I know, man, I know. Girls of today are different.

TJ

Apparently.

ED

They are, but in a good way, see? *(Gestures toward ASHLEY)* They're not as serious, they're less inhibited, more comfortable with their bodies. You should be happy. I'd love to be a young guy right now. I read that most teenage girls don't even think of blowjobs as sex anymore.

TJ

Where'd you read that?

ED

Seventeen Magazine.

TJ

Why are you reading--never mind.

ED

They've all changed--for the better if you ask me. Remember the chicks when we were in high school? It's all different now.

TJ

We're not that old, are we?

ED

We're older than you think. Remember how they all looked like Molly Ringwald and Murphy Brown and the lead singer of The Cure? Not anymore. I was walking down the street the other day and thought I saw a gang of club-wielding hookers walking toward me. Turned out it was a high school field hockey team. I was trippin'. But don't worry. We'll go in the other room so we don't bother you.

TJ

You're not bothering me, I just...I don't know.

ED

Teeeej...

TJ

I was a little surprised, that's all.

ED

It's all good. We'll finish up in the bedroom till you get acclimated an' shit to the new way of things.

TJ

OK. I don't mean to be a pain.

ED

No problem. Hey Ashley--we're gonna finish up in the bedroom.

TJ

Thanks.

(ED exits. ASHLEY follows.)

TJ

(To ASHLEY) Hi. Nice shoot.

ASHLEY

(with much attitude) Excuse me?

TJ

Oh, I just said nice...I wanted to introduce myself. I'm TJ. I saw you last week when I--

ASHLEY

I know who you are.

TJ

(nervously) Oh, great. So, uh, where do you go to school?

ASHLEY

(Beat) Are you fucking kidding me?

(ASHLEY turns and undoes the back of her bra as she exits. When she has exited, she throws her bra onstage.)

ED (O.S.)

Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, they're free at last!

(TJ walks over, picks it up, and looks offstage for a few beats.)

TJ

Psst! Ed? Come here!

(ED reenters.)

ED

Teej, you gotta let me finish the shoot--

TJ

What are you doing?

ED

I'm taking some pictures.

TJ

She's topless.

ED

Yeah, she is one rack-tacular young thing, ain't she?

TJ

You said you only took pictures of women in lingerie.

ED

I do.

TJ

Then why am I looking at her breasts?

ED

'Cause they're perfect.

TJ

You promised me this wasn't a porn site, that it was just girls in lingerie, that they wouldn't be naked.

ED

She's not naked...just a little topless.

TJ

How is she topless and not naked?

ED

She's wearing lingerie on the bottom.

TJ

And that's not naked?

ED

No, man, it's topless.

TJ

Topless is naked.

ED

Topless is topless. Naked is bottomless, like in the strip clubs.

TJ

The topless girls in strip clubs are naked.

ED

Naw man, they can't serve hooch when the chicks are bottomless 'cause that's when they're naked.

TJ

(Beat) What?

ED

Look, we're doing some topless shoots now due to market demands. If we're gonna compete, we gotta show more fleshy-flesh. Now that's the reality of the situation.

TJ

I'm not comfortable with this.

ED

It's all good. It'll be just like living in a strip club.

TJ

I don't want to live in a strip club.

ED

Why not?

TJ

I don't go to them normally--why would I want one in my apartment?

ED

No, it's *our* apartment, yours and the company's. *(Beat)* Man, relax and enjoy. Look around you--you live in a phat crib with a little hottie doing a striptease in your bedroom, and you're complaining?

(TJ looks offstage.)

TJ

She's completely naked now.

ED

Yeah. Market demands--what can I say?

TJ

I want you to be straight with me. What else is going on around here?

ED

Nothing. It's totally cool.

TJ

Ed?

ED

All right, I'll be taking pictures of naked women, but that's it, that's as far as it goes. The company has a really strict policy: no ding-dong.

TJ

No ding-dong?

ED

None. It's strictly beautiful girls posing in lingerie, topless, or buck-naked...or with each other.

TJ

They pose with each other?

ED

Sometimes.

TJ

Like how?

ED

Like with just a little nuzzling.

TJ

They do lesbian stuff?

ED

A little.

TJ

How is that not pornography?

ED

Because there's no ding-dong.

TJ

No ding-dong equals not pornography?

ED

Yeah.

TJ

You have some strange ideas.

ED

What I'm saying is that you won't have to worry about some Derek von Monster Dong showing up at yo crib at two o'clock in the morning, that's all.

TJ

Well thank God for that.

ASHLEY (O.S.)

Eddie, can we get started?

ED

Yeah, baby. I'll be right in. *(To TJ)* I gotta get back to work. Don't worry about a thing. We'll talk more tomorrow.

(ED exits.)

ED (O.S.)

All right, girl. Let's get down to business.

(There is a knock at the door. TJ opens it.)

VOICE (OS)

Ya!

TJ

Who are you?

VOICE (OS)

Ah, mein scheisse!

TJ

What do you want?

VOICE (OS)

Blas mir ein!

TJ

Wow! You must be Derek!

VOICE (OS)

Das ist gut!

TJ

Well, they don't need you tonight, Derek, so you'll have to leave.

VOICE (OS)

Blas mein scheisse!

(TJ slams the door shut. And walks center stage.)

TJ

Ed!!!

(Lights fade.)

END OF ACT I

ACT II

Scene 1

(Wolfgang's Pub. At rise, a despondent TJ drinks a bottle of lager. Susan enters.)

SUSAN

I thought I'd find you here.

TJ

Susan?

SUSAN

You haven't been to work all week. Is everything OK?

TJ

Yeah...I haven't been feeling well. *(fake coughs)*

SUSAN

You look exhausted.

TJ

I haven't been getting much sleep either.

SUSAN

Is it the flu?

TJ

Sure.

SUSAN

Ms. Steinman has been really upset. You haven't phoned, you haven't called in sick or anything.

TJ

Darn--and I thought I could stay below the radar.

SUSAN

Below the radar is one thing. Dropping off the face of the earth is another. Is this what you've been doing? Sitting here all week getting drunk?

TJ

I can't get drunk here--the bartender serves me once per hour.

SUSAN

I tried to call you. I found your change of address form and called the number on it, but some woman answered and asked me if I wanted to...well, I won't repeat what she asked me to do.

TJ

Yeah?

SUSAN

They were playing this really bad seventies music, and...I think I heard people moaning...in German.

TJ

That's strange.

SUSAN

TJ, what's going on?

TJ

Nothing.

SUSAN

Who were those people in your apartment?

TJ

You must've dialed the wrong number.

SUSAN

I called it five times.

TJ

Then you should change your service.

SUSAN

I heard them call your name and heard you respond.

TJ

Is this a crazy world, or what?

SUSAN

I would just like to know who they are.

TJ
Why?

SUSAN
(Beat) No reason.

TJ
Intrigued?

SUSAN
Certainly not. It's none of my business what sorts of *scandalous* parties you throw.
(Beat) None whatsoever.

TJ
Good, because I'm not having any.

SUSAN
Fine. I only came here because the catalogue is due tomorrow. Does that ring a bell?

TJ
Uh-huh.

SUSAN
Have you finished it?

TJ
I finished it months ago. Whatever I hand in won't be good enough.

SUSAN
That's why I'm here. I want to help.

TJ
Ms. Steinman wouldn't approve.

SUSAN
Right now I think she's more interested in getting anything from you. I went to see her in her office and she was taping strands of shredded catalogue together.

TJ
You made my day.

SUSAN
Do you ever plan to come back to work?

TJ

Absolutely.

SUSAN

Then where have you been?

TJ

I've been taking care of some personal business.

SUSAN

Like what? You've been acting very strangely these past two weeks.

TJ

Maybe, but I could say the same about you. You've been Ms. Ultra Stressed Out--even more so than usual--working insane hours, going out shopping with Ms. Steinman, buying me pink sweaters--

SUSAN

I had nothing to do with that. *(Beat)* You're right. Who am I to criticize someone else's behavior?

(TJ slides a bar stool out for SUSAN.)

TJ

Join me for a drink.

SUSAN

I didn't come here for a drink. I came here to find you because I'm worried about you.

TJ

Really?

SUSAN

I mean I'm worried about your job...about the catalogue. I want to help you finish it. I brought the Virginia Woolfs with me.

TJ

All right, but if you want to help me you're gonna have to stay here because this is where I'll be for the rest of the evening.

(SUSAN sits down reluctantly.)

TJ (cont'd)

What do you want to drink?

SUSAN

I'll have a diet coke.

TJ

Over my dead body.

(TJ takes out a bill and waves it.)

TJ (cont'd)

Bartender! A cosmopolitan and another lager, please.

(He hands the bill to SUSAN.)

TJ (cont'd)

You better order.

(TJ and SUSAN freeze. Stagehands put an empty martini glass on the bar and a full one in SUSAN's hand. They slam three empty beer bottles down on the bar in a row. They exit.)

(TJ and SUSAN unfreeze. They are giggling and cheerful.)

TJ

So I look at my suit and realize my suit pants fell off the hanger and are in my buddy's car. Of course I realize this as he's driving away. So I arrive at my big, important interview wearing a well-starched shirt, a suit jacket, mirror-polished shoes...and a pair of blue jeans. I must've looked like fifty bucks.

SUSAN

(laughs) Should I even ask if you got the job?

(TJ gives her a look.)

Oh well. Who needed that job anyway, right?

TJ

When the company IPO'd the following year, even the secretaries made millions.

SUSAN

Oh.

TJ

You live, you learn.

SUSAN

And what did you learn from that experience?

TJ

Not a damn thing.

(They both laugh.)

SUSAN

Well don't worry about it. It wasn't meant to be.

TJ

You sound like my old roommate. *(Beat)* So what about you? Any wacky interview stories?

SUSAN

Not really. *(Beat)* I watched my older sister have plenty, though.

TJ

Any good ones?

SUSAN

Oh, yeah. There was the time the guy doing the interview kept staring at her breasts. That was a good one. Then there was the one where the marketing director of a company asked her out on a date right after the interview. That was special. But my favorite was the entire year she had to listen to all her male classmates say that the only reason she was getting job offers was because she was a woman.

TJ

When was that?

SUSAN

The early nineties.

TJ

That's a little before my time.

SUSAN

Yeah, well...it really upset her and it made me furious.

TJ

So you teamed up with Ms. Steinman and became a power broker of rare books to show all those awful men who not to F. U. C. K. with?

SUSAN

Power broker of what? *(laughs, then seriously)* Don't fuck with me TJ. *(laughs)*

TJ

(astonished) Wow.

SUSAN

You act like you never heard me swear.

TJ

I haven't. I didn't think it was possible.

SUSAN

Oh it's possible. *(Beat)* Don't look so stunned.

TJ

I'm not.

SUSAN

No one is as simple as they appear. That goes doubly for a woman--triple if she's the least bit interesting.

TJ

I find you very interesting.

SUSAN

God help you.

TJ

We need more drinks.

(TJ takes out a bill and hands it to SUSAN.)

TJ (cont'd)

Please do the honors of ordering another round.

SUSAN

I'll get this one.

TJ

You sure?

SUSAN

I make a lot more money than you.

TJ

Oh.

(TJ and SUSAN freeze. Stagehands put three more empty martini glasses on the bar for a total of four. They slam down five more empty beer bottles in a row for a total of eight. The STAGEHAND takes a step back, considers TJ for a moment, and then slams another one down to make nine.)

(TJ and SUSAN unfreeze. Both are drunk, but SUSAN hides it better. She stares absently ahead as he speaks.)

TJ

I mean, come on. So what--she sends me to the bar so I can come back to find her making out with her friend on the dance floor? It takes me an hour to get these fucking drinks and I come back to find my date acting like she's at an Indio Girls concert? And all my friends are like, "Dude, you hit the jackpot. Dude, you gotta get in on that. Dude, that's every dude's dream." Well it's not my dream. *(Beat)* You know?

SUSAN

Oh sure.

TJ

All I want is to find a nice girl and settle down--minus the lesbianism--and have a family. *(Turn's to SUSAN)* What's so wrong with that?

SUSAN

Nothing.

TJ

I'm not giving up. I know that kind of life still exists somewhere.

SUSAN

Sure. You just have to find a woman who's into that too.

TJ

Well I'm looking. *(Beat)* So what's your deal with marriage and all that shit?

SUSAN

(chuckles) My family would've had both me and my sister married off by sixteen if they could've. Seemed we were getting different messages everywhere else.

TJ

Yeah, I don't think Ms. Steinman would approve.

SUSAN

You always say that, like she controls my life or something.

TJ

Well, you do spend most of your life at work, and since she is your boss, she kinda does control your life.

SUSAN

God, you're right.

TJ

The life a protégé is tough, huh?

SUSAN

I'm not her protégé--not anymore. She treats me like an equal for the most part. The problem is she doesn't understand me. She thinks she does, but she doesn't. She's made it her mission to keep me on the right track and make me a modern woman, but then I started thinking: *I'm* the modern woman here, not her. I need to make some changes in my life. I'm just not sure what kind.

TJ

Changes like settling down with someone?

SUSAN

You sure have marriage on the brain. I didn't know men have biological clocks.

TJ

What's wrong with marriage?

SUSAN

Nothing.

TJ

There's nothing wrong with it.

SUSAN

I didn't say there was. I think it's sweet you want to be a dad.

	TJ
Don't call me sweet. I'm not sweet.	
	SUSAN
Yes you are.	
	TJ
Really, I'm not.	
	SUSAN
I mean it in a good way.	
	TJ
But I'm not. I can be mean.	
	SUSAN
<i>(Beat)</i> Really?	
	TJ
Sometimes.	
	SUSAN
Like when?	
	TJ
Like if I'm pushed to that point.	
	SUSAN
And how far away is that point?	
	TJ
It varies.	
	SUSAN
<i>(Beat)</i> Think you could be mean to me?	
	TJ
Why--why would I ever do that?	
	SUSAN
<i>(Smiles)</i> Might be fun.	
	TJ

I've never seen this side of you before.

SUSAN

But how often have we seen each other outside of work?

TJ

Never.

SUSAN

There you go. *(Long beat, then laughter.)*

TJ

What?

SUSAN

Your face.

TJ

What?

SUSAN

You have this look of shock.

TJ

I'm not shocked. I was...just starting to think you weren't having a good time.

SUSAN

Oh I'm having such a good time. I can't remember the last time I went out. *(beat, looking at the bar)* I've had a lot of cosmopolitans.

TJ

Yes you have.

SUSAN

Back in college I was told I hid it well when I was drunk. I have been known to get a little crazy when I've had too much.

TJ

How crazy?

SUSAN

(almost a whisper) It's best not to talk about such things.

TJ

Well then it's a good thing we have that company policy to keep us from dating or else we might get into trouble tonight.

(Awkward silence)

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that--

SUSAN

No, it's OK--

TJ

No, I shouldn't have--

SUSAN

It's fine. Trust me...it's fine.

(They stare at each other until the lights flicker.)

TJ

Looks like they're kicking us out.

SUSAN

Yeah.

TJ

We never did get to the catalogue.

SUSAN

True. *(Beat)* I guess we'll just have to continue this at your place.

TJ

My place?

SUSAN

Yeah. Don't you live around here?

TJ

(nervously) Yeah.

SUSAN

So...

TJ

Um...well...I don't know if that's such a good idea.

SUSAN

Why not?

TJ

It's really messy.

SUSAN

I don't mind.

TJ

No, I mean really messy--underwear all over the place...like, *all* over the place.

SUSAN

Sounds charming.

TJ

And I have roaches.

(SUSAN gasps facetiously.)

TJ (cont'd)

Yeah, big, flying ones, imported from South America.

(SUSAN moves in closer.)

TJ (cont'd)

I once watched them carry my neighbor's infant away.

SUSAN

That's too bad.

TJ

I have rats too. Big...rats. They're the size of small dogs.

SUSAN

That sounds terrible.

(TJ and SUSAN move in toward each other.)

TJ (cont'd)

Well, maybe not dogs...but definitely a good-sized cat. *(beat, they're almost touching)*
Actually they're pretty well-behaved.

(They kiss.)

TJ

Check! (*beat, then to SUSAN*) You better ask.

ACT II

Scene 4

(TJ's apartment. At rise the apartment is empty. A laptop computer rests on the coffee table.)

TJ (O.S.)

Now wait here for a second.

SUSAN (O.S.)

Can't I come in?

TJ (O.S.)

I have to make sure the coast is clear...you know, because of the roaches.

SUSAN (O.S.)

Oh right.

(TJ enters.)

TJ

(whispering) Ed? Ed, are you here?

(TJ searches the apartment. Satisfied, he opens the door for SUSAN.)

TJ

The coast is clear.

SUSAN

Nothing carrying off a neighbor's child?

TJ

Not tonight. *(Beat)* Well, here it is.

SUSAN

Wow. This *is* a beautiful apartment.

TJ

It's in a great location too. That's really everything.

SUSAN

So how *can* you afford this?

(TJ shrugs self-consciously.)

SUSAN (cont'd)

Forget it. None of my business.

TJ

Let's get to it then.

SUSAN

You don't waste any time, do you?

TJ

I mean the catalogue.

SUSAN

Oh...right.

(SUSAN takes out the two books and sets one down next to the computer. TJ walks to the back of the sofa. SUSAN walks around to him holding the other book.)

SUSAN (cont'd)

Let's start with *Three Guineas*.

TJ

Did Ms. Steinman come up with something?

SUSAN

She did. Below the picture of the book she's wants the caption: "To hit back at the tyrannous hypocrisy of men!"

TJ

It's catchy.

(SUSAN drops the book on the sofa and they collapse into a frenzied embrace, kissing and tearing at each other's clothes as they fall behind it and out of view.)

TJ

Oh Susan! It's been so long.

SUSAN

Me too! Oh! Oh! *(Beat)* Are you crying?

TJ

(voice cracking) There's something in my eye.

SUSAN

You are so sensitive.

TJ

No I'm not!

SUSAN

Yes you are. You're so sweet and sensitive.

TJ

No--

(TJ rises from behind the sofa with SUSAN in his arms.)

TJ (cont'd)

--I'm...not!

SUSAN

You're so strong.

(TJ drops her.)

TJ

Sorry.

(SUSAN rises.)

TJ (cont'd)

Are you OK?

SUSAN

It was just my head.

TJ

Here, let's try that again.

(TJ picks her up.)

TJ (cont'd)

There.

SUSAN

I feel so safe in your arms.

(TJ drops her again.)

SUSAN (cont'd)

Why don't we just stay here?

(SUSAN rises.)

TJ

Sorry.

SUSAN

That's OK--the blows to the head have stopped the room from spinning.

TJ

This isn't right. You're drunk.

SUSAN

So are you.

TJ

I know, but I can't. I'd feel like I was taking advantage of you.

SUSAN

Is that how you really feel, or is that something you think you're supposed to say?

TJ

That one.

SUSAN

Well don't worry about that. Save the guilt for tomorrow morning.

TJ

Fair enough.

(They hurry off to the bedroom.)

ACT II

Scene 5

(TJ's apartment, the following morning. TJ enters from the bedroom wearing a t-shirt and boxer shorts. He is hung-over and stretches as he walks stage right. He hears someone stir in the bedroom, smiles, and walks to the door.)

TJ

So how do you feel this morning?

(ED enters from the bedroom with a camera.)

ED

Like ass, dawg.

(TJ screams.)

TJ

Ed?

ED

Morning.

TJ

What the hell are you doing here?

ED

I was just about to ask you the same thing.

TJ

I live here.

ED

Wait--where am I?

TJ

You're in my living room...way too early on a Friday morning.

ED

Friday? Shit, what's the date?

TJ
The third.

ED
(desperately) No, I mean the year.

TJ
[current year].

ED
(throwing up both arms) Yes!! It worked!!

TJ
What?

ED
(Beat) Huh?

TJ
What the fuck are you doing here?

ED
I don't know, man. Let me catch my bearings.

TJ
Why are you holding a camera?

ED
Oh, I was here to do a shoot...yeah, that's right, but they bailed on me. And then I passed out in the closet. And then I woke up to these two hellcats goin' at it like the world was ending. Man, you shoulda seen them go!

TJ
(Shaking his head) No. No, you didn't.

ED
What?

TJ
Ed, tell me you didn't take any pictures in my bedroom last night.

ED
No, I couldn't, it was too dark.

(TJ sighs with relief.)

ED (cont'd)

Luckily we installed those night-vision web cameras.

TJ

You installed what cameras? Where?

ED

In your bedroom. Didn't I tell you? *(Beat)* Oh shit. Well then you must've seen the note I left telling you to stay out of the...

(ED pulls a crumpled note out of his pocket.)

ED (cont'd)

Hey, my bad.

(TJ jumps up, runs over to his computer, and starts typing.)

TJ

(Frustrated) Get over here and login into your porn site!

ED

It ain't a porn site.

TJ

Just do it!

(ED walks to the computer and logs in. They both stare at the computer. TJ's face drops; a look of nausea builds throughout ED's exclamations.)

ED

Yes! Damn, look at you go! That's what I'm talking about! Fuckin' rock and roll, jack! Teej scored! I told you movin' in here was a good idea!

TJ

(Bends down) I think I'm gonna throw up.

ED

Why?

TJ

I'm gonna pass out.

ED

Relax.

TJ

I think I'm gonna be sick.

ED

Dude, are you gonna be sick, or are you gonna pass out?

TJ

Oh, Christ.

ED

Relax. Damn, look at you--you look like you've been dragged down ten miles of bad road.

(TJ bends down and takes deep breaths.)

ED (cont'd)

All right, I'm sorry. I'm sorry I forgot to tell you. Don't be like that. Come on, dawg. It's all good.

TJ

No, Ed, it's not all good. It's not even a little good. Surely even you can understand how awkward it will be when I have to sit down and tell Susan that our night of passion was filmed and posted to a fucking porn site!

ED

I swear it was an accident. Really, we'd never film someone with a unit that small.

(TJ tackles ED to the ground.)

ED (cont'd)

Yo, man! What are you doing?

TJ

I'm gonna kill you, Ed! I'm gonna choke the living shit out of you in a real funky, kinda groovy way! What do you think about that, *dawg*? Is *that* all good?

ED

Wait a minute! You're fine. You're golden. It's just 'cause of market demands, there are certain metrics we gotta meet.

(SUSAN groans offstage.)

TJ

Shit! Susan's awake.

SUSAN (O.S.)

(realizing where she is and what has happened)

Oh my god!

(SUSAN enters from the bedroom holding her head. She is very hung-over. She sees that TJ is not alone and darts back into the room and pokes her head out.)

SUSAN

TJ, who's that?

TJ

Hi! Oh...this is my friend, Ed. He stopped by unexpectedly and I was just so...thrilled to see him I had to give him a big hug. *(Beat)* Where are my manners? Ed, this is Susan.

ED

(labored) Nice to meet you.

SUSAN

Think maybe you should stop squeezing his throat?

TJ

Probably. *(laughs weakly)* Hey, why don't you go back to bed and I'll make coffee and breakfast and bring it in to you.

SUSAN

(groans) Don't mention food.

ED

(To TJ) I wouldn't recommend that anyway.

TJ

Why not?

(ED motions toward the computer.)

TJ (cont'd)

You know, he's right. I was actually thinking about putting new sheets on that bed.
(winces) Why don't you go into the other bedroom--

(ED coughs and shakes his head.)

SUSAN

Do you have to do that now?

TJ

No. That's a silly idea. Why don't I make you some coffee and you can have it in the kitchen.

SUSAN

Coffee would be good.

(ED coughs and shakes his head again.)

TJ (cont'd)

On second thought, why don't you go into the...

(TJ looks to ED who shrugs his shoulders.)

SUSAN

You know what? I think I'll take a shower.

(ED clears his throat violently and shakes his head.)

TJ

No!

SUSAN

I can't take a shower?

TJ

Sure you can...absolutely, it's just that I...would like you to stay...dirty a bit longer.

SUSAN

(beat while eyeing TJ suspiciously)

I'm gonna take a shower.

TJ

(feebly) OK.

(SUSAN exits to the bedroom. TJ continues to choke ED.)

TJ (cont'd)

You sick fuck! How many cameras did you put in my apartment?

ED

It's *our* apartment, dawg.

TJ

Do you understand that you're about to die?

ED

All right, all right. I'll get rid of the cameras.

TJ

And the video?

ED

I'll call our guy and tell him to take it off.

TJ

How could you install cameras in my apartment without telling me? How could you install them period?

ED

Market demands. I forgot to take them down.

TJ

You forgot? You forgot! You better not be lying to me!

ED

Cut me some slack. I've been rolling on E all week. Just be glad I didn't crawl into bed when you two were looking all lovey.

TJ

I want them out of my apartment right now!

ED

All right, man, I will.

TJ

And start with the bathroom camera so Susan can take a shower without the peepshow feature.

(TJ lets go of ED and both men rise.)

ED

OK. Damn, it felt like you were really gonna kill me.

TJ

You're goddamn right I'm gonna kill you. That video better be off the website by the time she gets out of the shower.

ED

OK, OK, just take it easy. I'll take the camera down now.

(ED turns to go.)

TJ

Wait! Get the video off first.

ED

But what about the bathroom camera?

TJ

I'll stall her.

(SUSAN slips past them and into the bathroom.)

TJ (cont'd)

I'll keep her in the bedroom till you remove the camera.

ED

(smiling) You're gonna *(quote marks)* stall her?

TJ

(Beat) Don't, man.

ED

All right, all right. Gettin' all violent an' shit.

(TJ exits to the bedroom. Shower sounds. ED clicks and types away at the computer. After a few beats, TJ reenters.)

TJ

Where's Susan?

(ED points to the computer screen. TJ stares at it with mouth agape. ED gives the thumbs up.)

TJ (cont'd)

Don't look at her!

ED

Chill!

TJ

Oh my God. She's never gonna forgive me. Forget about forgiveness--she's gonna sue me for millions of dollars.

ED

No she won't.

TJ

My life is over.

ED

Relax. We're gonna fix it. Don't worry. I'll call my guy right now.

TJ

I have liked this girl for so long, and last night I finally connected with her, and you put it out for all the world to see.

ED

That's beautiful, man.

TJ

I swear if anything bad happens to her, as God is my witness, the next thing your members will be downloading is a video of me cutting your balls off with a plastic spoon!

ED

There's no need for violence. I believe it was Gandhi who said--

TJ

I'm about to freak the fuck out here!

ED

All right, but the longer you yell at me, the longer that video is gonna be on the website.

(TJ hyperventilates.)

ED (cont'd)

Breathe, dawg, breathe! You want me to get you a paper bag?

TJ

(gasping) No, I want you to fix this.

ED

OK. You go in the bathroom and take care of the camera. It's mounted above the showerhead--

TJ

I know where it's mounted!

ED

You do that, and I'll get in touch with my web guy. I'll call him, email him, page him--whatever it takes.

TJ

(Beat) Thanks for going the extra mile.

ED

Hey, *(hits his chest twice)* just the way God made me.

TJ

How am I gonna get the camera without her seeing me?

ED

Just join her in the shower. When she's not looking, rub some soap on the lens.

TJ

I can't join her in the shower.

ED

Why not?

TJ

Because I can't.

ED

Why?

TJ

I can't just waltz in there.

ED

Sure you can. You already tapped squeanies last night. What's the big deal?

TJ

Tapped what?

ED

The deed is done. You've seen all there is to see; now get in there.

TJ

All right. Just call the guy.

*(TJ exits to the bathroom. ED dials his cellphone
and types at the computer.)*

SUSAN (O.S.)

Who's there?

TJ (O.S.)

Hi.

(SUSAN screams.)

TJ (O.S.) (cont'd)

Don't mind me.

SUSAN (O.S.)

What are you doing?

TJ (O.S.)

I'm just gonna steal some of your soap.

SUSAN (O.S.)

Get out! I'm taking a shower.

TJ (O.S.)

It's all right.

SUSAN (O.S.)

It's not all right.

TJ (O.S.)

Wait, just let me--

SUSAN (O.S.)

Get out!

TJ (O.S.)

I just have to do something. Could you turn around to face me?--

SUSAN (O.S.)

TJ!

TJ (O.S.)

What's the big deal? We--we tapped...squeanies last night.

SUSAN (O.S.)

Tapped what? Get the fuck out of here!

TJ (O.S.)

OK!

SUSAN (O.S.)

Right now!

TJ (O.S.)

All right.

SUSAN (O.S.)

I said get out.

TJ (O.S.)

I have to put on my pants.

SUSAN (O.S.)

Out, out, out, out, out!

(TJ enters.)

ED

I can still see her.

TJ

Shut up. What about the video?

ED

I can't get in touch with my guy.

TJ

What does that mean? How--how can't you get in touch with him?

ED

He must've turned off his phone.

TJ

Ed, you gotta find him. Please.

ED

All right. I think Ashley might know where he is.

(ED prepares to leave.)

ED (cont'd)

Don't worry, Teej. I'll take care of everything.

*(ED pats him on the back and exits. Susan enters.
Her head and body are wrapped in towels.)*

SUSAN

We have to talk.

TJ

I know.

SUSAN

I'm sorry I yelled at you, but you startled me.

TJ

Don't apologize. I shouldn't have done that.

SUSAN

Look--don't take this the wrong way, but I'm not too proud about what I did last night.

TJ

You have nothing to be ashamed of.

SUSAN

I don't normally drink and I had a lot.

TJ

We both did.

SUSAN

I know, but there are different rules for you and me. That's what I have to deal with right now.

TJ

We did nothing wrong.

SUSAN

Just promise me: what happened in that bedroom last night stays between the two of us. OK?

TJ

(Slow take to the audience) Absolutely.

SUSAN

Do I have your word as a gentleman?

TJ

(Beat) Of course.

SUSAN

Thank you.

(SUSAN exits to the bedroom. There's a knock at the door. TJ opens it and JAMIE rushes in wearing his work uniform.)

JAMIE

Oh, you scoundrel! You cur!

TJ

Jamie?

JAMIE

I just had to see it with my own eyes.

TJ

I don't mean to be rude, but you caught me at a really bad time.

JAMIE

Oh, I doubt that. I doubt the Great One has any bad days.

TJ

(Beat) Why are you here?

JAMIE

(Looks around) Yes, this is it! This is where the magic takes place.

TJ

I know there's sound coming out of your mouth, but I can't understand a word of it.

JAMIE

Oh, you're good. You're very, very good, but you've fooled me with that babe in the woods routine for the last time. What a dolt I've been, trying to teach *you* about women, the same man who was on my computer screen fornicating like an adult film star in the most ostentatious of manners.

TJ

You saw the video?

JAMIE

Saw it? I rubbed off to it twice.

TJ

How? Don't tell me you're a Sexadelphia.com member.

JAMIE

Indeed I am.

TJ

Since when?

JAMIE

Since last week. A man with my depressing lifestyle has certain needs.

TJ

What needs? You have it all. You have everything I've ever wanted.

JAMIE

Yeah? Like what?

TJ

You're engaged, you have Tina--

JAMIE

That woman is driving me absolutely batty. I never realized how irrational women are.

TJ

You haven't given it a chance.

JAMIE

Oh, if anything, I know when to cut my losses. And I just can't bear to go on with such a banal existence when I know that you're living here, with this rock star lifestyle. *(Beat)* Let me move in with you!

TJ

Are you insane?

JAMIE

Please. I'll do anything; just let me in on this.

TJ

I don't have time to deal with you today, so if you don't mind, please leave...right now.

JAMIE

(Beat) Oh, I see. And the first shall be last and the last shall be first. So that's how it's going to be, eh? Mr. Famous Person no longer needs his friends.

TJ

It's not like that.

JAMIE

Mr. Famous Person is too busy yodeling in the Valley of the Dolls to throw his old buddy a few crumbs--

TJ

Listen to me! You don't understand. That girl in the video...that's Susan.

JAMIE

You've worked with a porn star all this time?

TJ

She's not a porn star! Neither of us knew we were being filmed.

JAMIE

You mean...Oh dear.

TJ

We came back here last night to do work stuff...

(TJ points to the coffee table. JAMIE picks up the one on the sofa.)

JAMIE

Virginia Woolf--I don't get her.

(JAMIE tosses the book on the table.)

TJ

Anyway, it's a long story, but now we're on the internet.

JAMIE

She doesn't know?

TJ

No, she doesn't.

JAMIE

You have to tell her.

TJ

I don't know how.

JAMIE

She won't be too happy about this.

TJ

You think? While you're at, say something else incredibly obvious like, my life is over!

JAMIE

Your life is not over. It has just begun.

(SUSAN enters.)

JAMIE (cont'd)

Here's some free advice from a person in the know--play the field. Thank Susan for a pleasant evening of intercourse, and then move on.

SUSAN

You told him? You promised you wouldn't tell!

TJ

I didn't!

SUSAN
You gave me your word!

TJ
But I didn't!

JAMIE
He didn't tell me.

TJ
See?

JAMIE
I saw your love-making broadcast live over the internet.

SUSAN
(Beat) Normally I'd laugh at that, but I'm really hung-over right now and I'm going to lie down.

(SUSAN walks toward the bedroom. JAMIE gestures to TJ.)

TJ
(Beat) He's right, Susan.

(SUSAN stops and turns around.)

SUSAN
What?

TJ
It's true.

SUSAN
What's true?

TJ
What he just said, about last night being on the internet.

SUSAN
I'm not in the mood for jokes.

TJ
I'm not joking.

SUSAN

What are you saying? That...you video-taped last night?

TJ

I didn't. It was that guy I was choking. He did.

SUSAN

(chuckles, then serious) But how?

TJ

Remember when you asked me how I could afford a place like this?

SUSAN

Yeah.

TJ

You're not gonna like the answer.

SUSAN

Go on.

TJ

Well it's actually kind of funny--

SUSAN

TJ!

TJ

I split the rent with a porn site.

JAMIE

The man's a genius!

TJ

But I didn't know it was a porn site until I moved in and signed the lease. I thought he only took pictures of girls in lingerie.

SUSAN

Girls in lingerie.

TJ

Yeah...and girls that are a little bit topless, but not naked.

JAMIE

How are they topless but not naked?

TJ

So that's why I didn't want to come back here last night, but...Susan, I've liked you for such a long time, and I didn't want anything to ruin the evening.

SUSAN

So you filmed us having sex?

TJ

No! See, Ed put the cameras in and forgot to tell me...not that I would've let him had he told me. But then he left them in because he was rolling on E all week, but now he's out there and...I'm telling you, this guy...*(chuckles nervously)* this guy is good, and he's gonna find the person who does the website and take it off and destroy it. So you have nothing to worry about. You have my word.

SUSAN

(Beat, then to JAMIE) And you saw the video of us.

JAMIE

Yes. You should be very proud.

(SUSAN attacks TJ.)

JAMIE (cont'd)

Perhaps I should leave you two alone.

TJ

Wait! Susan! Stop!

(SUSAN grabs the book from the coffee table and beats TJ with it. ED enters. When SUSAN sees him, she immediately attacks him with the book. ASHLEY enters.)

ASHLEY

Get off him, you crazy bitch!

(ASHLEY jumps on SUSAN and grabs the book. They start a tug-of-war with the book. The book rips in half; papers fly everywhere and ASHLEY and SUSAN wrestle around in them. ED grabs his camera and

takes pictures, stopping occasionally to throw papers up in the air.)

ED

Oh man, this is hot! Now Susan--give me a little more thigh.

(TJ shoves ED out of the way and then he and JAMIE break up the fight--TJ takes ASHLEY and JAMIE takes SUSAN.)

JAMIE

Now everybody calm down!

ASHLEY

Slut, you don't know who you're messin' with!

SUSAN

Bring it on, bitch!

TJ

(TJ starts to cry) I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

("You've got mail". Silence.)

TJ (cont'd)

Maybe that's the web guy.

(TJ sits down at the computer.)

TJ (cont'd)

See, everything's gonna be fine. Just like I promised... everything...
(lowers his brow as he reads)

SUSAN

What? *(Beat)* TJ, what is it?

TJ

It's an email from Marc Jacobson.

SUSAN

Why are you getting an email from him? He doesn't know you.

ASHLEY

Who's Marc Jacobson?

TJ

It's a mass distribution list. *(Beat)* Oh shit.

JAMIE

That doesn't sound good.

SUSAN

Read what it says!

TJ

Jamie, is Susan holding any sharp objects?

SUSAN

Read it!

TJ

(Reading) "It has come to my attention that Steinman Rare Books will be adding rare video to their collection, starting with this gem. As always, we'll see Susan Bailey *hard* at work"--asterisks around the word hard. There's a link to Sexadelphia.com.

ED

Trick! You can't buy advertising like that!

TJ

How could he have seen it?

SUSAN

That old horn-dog? He's probably a member.

ED

(revelation) Marc Jacobson! Yeah.

SUSAN

How large is the distribution list?

TJ

Huge. Now would you like the bad news? Ms. Steinman is on it. *(starts to cry)* I'm so sorry. Susan, I'm so very, very--

SUSAN

Shut up! You're falling apart on me. Could you *please* hold it together and be a man about this?

TJ

(Sniveling) You're saying I'm not a man?

SUSAN

That's right. I'm saying you're not a man.

TJ

Yeah?

SUSAN

Yeah. You're not doing anything. You just keep apologizing and--and weeping. Do something, for God's sake!

ED

She's right, dawg. You're being a total puss.

JAMIE

I must agree, TJ. I've seen more masculinity in a pair of X chromosomes.

ASHLEY

You don't want to know what I think.

JAMIE

Your woman is in distress. She needs you. Act, Man, don't react! Drive the situation! Take charge! Life has just delivered a glazed turkey when you clearly ordered a honey-baked ham weeks ago and the Johnsons are coming to pick it up for their son's graduation party in fifteen minutes. Do something!

ED

Be the dude you were in that video. You were beautiful, man.

(ASHLEY approaches TJ. She flips her hair to the side and plants a kiss on his lips. They kiss passionately as she hooks a leg around his waist. When they finish, she slaps him.)

TJ

Ed--I want you to remove the video from that website even if you have to bomb Sexadelphia headquarters.

ED

Right on!

TJ

Jamie?

JAMIE

Yes?

TJ

Go back to work. Ashley?

ASHLEY

Yeah?

TJ

I'll finish with you later. Susan?

SUSAN

Yes?

TJ

Despite everything, I had a really nice time last night.

SUSAN

Me too.

TJ

(outstretches his hand) Give me your hand.

(She does.)

Let's get to Ms. Steinman before that email does.

(Blackout.)

ACT II, Scene 6

(Steinman Rare Books. Traffic sounds in the black. At rise, STEINMAN sits at her desk in front of a laptop. She is motionless and stares blankly outward. Sounds fade. TJ and SUSAN run on stage and stop when they see her. They approach cautiously.)

SUSAN

Ms. Steinman?

TJ

Hi. Remember me? I bet you're wondering about the catalogue.

SUSAN

So...how are you feeling this morning? You look well. *(chuckles)* Did you receive any...news today? *(Beat)* Ms. Steinman? *(To TJ)* Why isn't she answering me?

(TJ walks around her desk to look at her computer screen.)

TJ

We're too late. The video is playing on her screen. *(Beat)* God, I gotta hit the gym.

SUSAN

Oh! *(Beat, then sheepishly)* Ms. Steinman, I am so sorry.

TJ

No, it was my fault. You see...it was a *really* nice apartment--

SUSAN

TJ! Please.

TJ

What? She doesn't like me anyway.

SUSAN

It was my fault, Ms. Steinman. I went out and got drunk and let myself lose control. I am so embarrassed. I just...I know I've let you down, but please, somehow find it in your heart to forgive me. I offer my most humble and sincere apology for disgracing you and the company. *(Beat)* I also offer my resignation.

TJ

Yeah, that can go for me too.

SUSAN

(Lengthy beat) Ms. Steinman? Aren't you gonna say something?

(STEINMAN falls face down onto her desk. TJ and SUSAN exchange a look and then TJ runs around to take her pulse.)

SUSAN (cont'd)

Is she...

TJ

Dead? I think so. Guess I don't have to do the catalogue now. Procrastination has paid off again!

SUSAN

How could you think of yourself at a time like this? You're so insensitive.

TJ

First I'm *too* sensitive, now I'm *insensitive*. Is there no pleasing you women?

(STAGEHANDS enter. STEINMAN is dragged off stage in her chair. A black hat is placed on SUSAN's head; TJ gets a black jacket.)

TJ (cont'd)

Sure was a nice service.

(SUSAN nods.)

TJ (cont'd)

Could've been a few more people there, but it was still nice.

SUSAN

We were practically the only ones there.

TJ

But the eulogy--it was good.

SUSAN

If you ignore how he used the wrong last name.

TJ

Yeah, that was bad. *(Beat)* I'm sorry, Susan. I know you were close to her.

SUSAN

She didn't have many friends. She always said exactly what was on her mind and it alienated her from a lot people. She could be really abrasive, was an incredible pain in the ass and drove me crazy, but she really had my best interests in mind as she saw them. She wanted to make me a better woman.

TJ

I think you're perfect the way you are.

SUSAN

One thing's for sure: had I listened to her, none of this would've happened. You know, I'm surprised I'm even speaking to you.

TJ

So am I. Why are you?

SUSAN

Because I've realized that you're as much a victim in this whole mess as I am.

TJ

No. I'm not.

SUSAN

Oh no?

TJ

Men can survive something like this. Women can't. It's not fair, but that's how it is.

SUSAN

So what are you saying: that, in your humble opinion, my life is over?

TJ

(Beat) Isn't it? *(Beat, then lowers his head)* And it's all my fault. I'll never forgive myself.

SUSAN

Whether my life's over or not, I still had a very interesting conversation at the funeral with Ms. Steinman's accountant.

TJ

Interesting like how?

SUSAN

Interesting like it turns out she had a will and made him the executor of it. *(Beat)* He said she left me everything.

TJ

Everything?

SUSAN

Uh-huh.

TJ

She left you Steinman Rare Books?

SUSAN

The whole company.

TJ

Wow! That's...that's great!

SUSAN

Yeah? I'll never be able to show my *face* in this town again much less sell another book. I'm a laughingstock, an object of ridicule...a whore. I might as well walk around with a giant red "A" painted on my chest. And as you so honestly put it, only a man could survive something like this.

(ED and ASHLEY enter. Both wear black. ASHLEY is sobbing uncontrollably.)

ED

There you are. I tried to catch y'all at the cemetery but you rolled before we got there. Oh, and, uh, you have my condolences an' shit.

SUSAN

Is she always like this at funerals?

ED

No, I just slammed her finger in the car door.

ASHLEY

I think it's broken.

ED

It's OK, baby, just spit on it.

SUSAN

What are you doing here?

ED

Oh, I got great news. You, Susan, are a Sexadelphia.com smash hit! You're a sensation! The phone's been ringing off the hook, the email inboxes are overflowing, the number of website hits almost brought down our servers. (*wide-eyed*) It's the market. It wants you.

SUSAN

Am I trapped in a nightmare? What are you talking about?

ED

I'm talking about your fans. They want you. They want you any which way they can get you.

SUSAN

Please, Ed: get on the anti-psychotics as soon as possible.

ED

I'm saner than sane. You are hot! We've never had this kind of reaction to anything we've put up. Someone even created a website dedicated to you and is distributing the video. (*Beat*) We'll sue him for it later, but it's generating a ton of buzz now.

SUSAN

Well that's really nice to hear. I'm sure that information will comfort me as I pick through the smoldering ruins of my life.

ED

Just hear me out. This thing has the makings of a money machine. Wait. (*sniffs*) Can you smell it? (*sniff*) That's the smell of monizzle, bizzle.

ASHLEY

Can you take me to the hospital?

ED

No, baby. I'm doing business over here.

SUSAN

No you're not. We have no business to discuss with the possible exception of a seven-figure lawsuit.

ED

Don't be like that. I'm offering you a great opportunity. When life hands you lemons, what do you do? You make lemonade, beeatch! And one thing's for sure: the market loves your lemons.

TJ

(To SUSAN) Hey, did you notice the number of messages on Ms. Steinman's answering machine? There's over thirty.

SUSAN

Erase them.

TJ

Why?

SUSAN

I don't want to hear them.

TJ

But--

SUSAN

TJ...

(TJ plays the answering machine.)

ANSWERING MACHINE

Beep. This message is for Susan.

SUSAN

I said erase them!

ANSWERING MACHINE

I am a private collector who is very interested in your copy of *Ulysses*. I think your asking price of fifty thousand dollars is far too low. Perhaps we could meet sometime to discuss a more...profitable price? Beep. Hello, Susan, this is Jim Cummins. I'd like to come and take a look at your *Leaves of Grass*...the book of poetry, that is. Beep. Susan, I'll offer you two hundred thousand dollars for your first edition copy of *Common Sense*. That's my final offer...who am I kidding, can we meet over lunch? Beep.

(TJ stops the machine.)

ED

I told you. You're in demand. Come on, girl, let me take some more pictures. I posted the one of you and Ashley rolling around in the papers. It's been voted the hottest photo of the week.

TJ

This doesn't make any sense.

ED

I'm telling you: you're are it.

TJ

Don't listen to him Susan.

SUSAN

(Beat, then to ED) Keep talking.

TJ

Susan?

ED

We'll be making silly gumby-gold money.

TJ

You're not thinking about taking him up on his offer?

SUSAN

(Pause) Not as he presented it, but I think he just gave me an idea.

TJ

But this...this isn't you. You're not like them. You're not from their world.

ED

Snap! Me and you went to the same high school!

SUSAN

Ed, I think I'd like to hear what you have in mind.

ED

All right!

SUSAN

But any business we do would be strictly under my terms.

ED

Name them.

TJ

But you can't. You can't get involved with him. Look at him, he's...a *pornographer*, and you're sweet and innocent and pure.

ED

I know you were *in* the video, but were you paying attention to what was going on?

TJ

This is unbelievable! You're going to listen to him? The man's insane! He's not making any sense. He's saying that a woman can get video-taped having sex, have it plastered all over the internet, and then use it to her advantage and profit from it? That's absurd!

SUSAN

We'll see.

TJ

Susan...I won't allow it.

SUSAN

You won't allow it? A minute ago you told me that my life was over. Well I find that conclusion unacceptable.

TJ

But...what about us.

SUSAN

Oh. *(Beat)* Don't worry: I'll let you keep your job. Ed?

ED

Yeah?

SUSAN

Let's do some business.

ED

Yeah!

(SUSAN, ED, and ASHLEY walk downstage.)

SUSAN

Coming, TJ? *(Beat)* Suit yourself.

(SUSAN, ED, and ASHLEY exit.)

(Blackout.)

ACT II, Scene 7

(Steinman Rare Books. At rise, TJ sits at his desk and types at a laptop.)

TJ

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. Lewis Carroll. New York, 1866. Octavo, modern full red morocco gilt, all edges gilt, marbled end papers. A rare first American edition of this classic where the main character endures harrowing experiences, loads of derision and ridicule, only to wake to find it was all one long, terrible dream.

(SUSAN enters wearing lingerie. TJ sees her and lowers the screen of his laptop.)

SUSAN

How's the catalogue?

TJ

Almost finished, Ms. Bailey.

SUSAN

Oh, stop it with the "Ms. Bailey" stuff.

(ED and ASHLEY enter. ASHLEY wears lingerie. ED carries a digital movie camera.)

SUSAN (cont'd)

Ed--there you are. How does the video look?

ED

Hot, baby. Red hot. You ready for the next one?

SUSAN

I am if Ashley is.

ASHLEY

I'm always ready for you.

ED

Cool. Let's do it.

(SUSAN and ASHLEY pose together.)

ED (cont'd)

All right now--Ashley, I want you to get in real close to Susan. Yeah, *real* close. Closer. You two are *very* tight, know what I'm sayin'. Now let me see the book. All right, do your thing.

SUSAN and ASHLEY

Hi. We're the girls of Steinman Rare Books, and we want to sell you *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Boston, 1850.

ASHLEY

(moans) It has the original blind-stamped brown cloth--

SUSAN

(saucily) And has been re-backed with the original spine laid-down.

SUSAN and ASHLEY

And it only costs forty-eight hundred dollars.

ASHLEY

So stop by for some hot, one-on-one sales action.

SUSAN

We'll be waiting.

ED

Now kiss.

(They kiss. ED puts down the camera and picks up another.)

ED (cont'd)

Hey, Teej--why don't you get in there. We need a good still.

TJ

I'm busy.

ED

Come on. Market figures show that dudes like to see a guy with two girls 'cause then they can superimpose their own face.

ASHLEY

Come on, Loverboy. Don't be scared.

ED

Come on, dawg.

SUSAN

(genuinely) Come on, TJ...but only if you want to.

(A long beat, and then TJ rises and stands between SUSAN and ASHLEY.)

TJ

What do you want me to do?

SUSAN

Smile.

ED

Yeah, smile. Smile like the lucky man you are. Now give me a thumbs up. Great. Now all of you give me a big smile. Bigger. Hold it. *(Beat)* That's the one.

(ED takes a picture. A beat, and then SUSAN, ASHLEY, and TJ's smiles all fade.)

(Blackout.)

END OF PLAY