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*To Callie*

## **Cast of Characters**

SALOME: a burnt-out but attractive, sexy woman

WENONAH: a conservative woman from New York City

CAROL: a somewhat known singer from Tennessee

KITTY: Salome's mother. An attractive woman from Tennessee, with a flair for fashion and design

SENATOR: a handsome, young Senator from California

RON: a neurotic, but talented guy

DUKE: Salome's superintendent

*(Ron and Duke are played by the same actor.)*

## **Time**

1990s

## **Place**

An extremely large bed...and its perimeters...

## **Production Notes**

The music and lyrics for the three songs Carol sings that appear in the text were written and composed by Neal Radice (based on song concepts by Catherine Filloux). These songs were used in the original production and are optional. Music and score are available from the playwright; contact Playscripts, Inc. with any inquiries.

## Acknowledgements

*Venus in the Birdbath* was first produced at Alleyway Theatre (Neal Radice, Executive Director) in Buffalo, New York (opening night October 25, 1990), with the following cast and staff:

SALOME.....	Adele Leas
WENONAH.....	Joyce Stilson
CAROL .....	Lorraine O'Donnell
KITTY.....	Darleen Pickering Hum- mert
SENATOR .....	Philip Knoerzer
DUKE/RON .....	John Daggett
Director .....	Nancy Doherty
Set and Lighting Designer .....	Neal Radice
Costume Designer.....	Lorraine O'Donnell
Properties Designer.....	Lucy Orlando
Sound Designer .....	Patrick Gorman
Stage Manager .....	Lucy Orlando
Music Production.....	Lorraine O'Donnell & Jim Calabrese

# VENUS IN THE BIRDBATH

by Catherine Filloux

## ACT I

### Scene 1

*(The stage is dark. From off right, we hear sounds from outside—a crowd of people laughing, clapping. Music from a marching band begins to play.)*

*Off left, loud, consistent knocking from behind a door, then a male voice calling, “Hello?” We hear keys in a lock.*

*A shaft of light cuts across the stage, as the apartment door now opens, illuminating a large pile of mail tossed chaotically on the floor. The shadow of a man, DUKE, is now seen in the doorway.)*

**DUKE.** She’s the princess of darkness. Permanently “out to lunch.”  
*Comatose...*

*(The marching band gets louder.)*

Fuckin’ parade. Jesus.

*(A young woman, WENONAH, holding a suitcase steps into the shaft of light.)*

**WENONAH.** I know. I asked this total stranger on the street what was going on, and she looked at me like it was the most normal thing in the world. *(Laughing too loudly)* That’s when I knew I was really in L.A.

**DUKE.** So you’re from New York?

*(WENONAH’s shadow leaps in reaction to something scurrying across the floor.)*

**WENONAH.** WHAT’S THAT?

**DUKE.** Horny toad... Lizard...

**WENONAH.** I think I prefer roaches. God, it’s so dark in there...

**DUKE.** Yeah, well got to get back to my vehicle. Parade or no parade she’s gettin’ a shine. Let me know what you work out...

**WENONAH.** Thanks for your help... Duke...

*(Closing the door, she fumbles for a light switch on the wall in the hallway. Low light comes on. WENONAH is dressed in a conservative manner, too much make-up.)*

*The room is dominated by one enormous bed made up in bright, bold but very tasteful floral designer sheets and heaped with pillows. The bed's perimeter is messily cluttered with paraphernalia for living.*

*The bed is a landscape of sleeping bodies. Frozen, WENONAH watches the Mr. Coffee machine time-activate. The brewing competes with the noise outside. CAROL, a young exotic Southern woman, rises from the far side of the bed and quickly puts on a party dress, softly singing. WENONAH clasps her hands together and takes a deep breath.)*

**WENONAH.** Uh, if I could just speak to the *renter*...?

**CAROL.** Think Herb will like it?

**WENONAH.** ...I legally own this place starting today.

*(CAROL glances at herself in a make-up mirror.)*

**CAROL.** God, where's my trowel?

**WENONAH.** My attorney keeps on sending warning correspondence.

*(CAROL points to the large pile of mail on the floor.)*

**CAROL.** Salome doesn't read her mail.

**WENONAH.** *(Urgently:)* My designer, Pif, is working on the renovation. We've been more than clear about the closing date.

*(CAROL points to one of the sleeping forms.)*

**CAROL.** Talk to SALOME, it's her place.

*(CAROL flicks on a rehearsal tape in her tape player and soulfully belts out the lyrics of "Jet Lag Hotel.")*

**CAROL.** "Spinnin' over northern lights  
You're flyin' way too high..."

(SALOME, a burnt-out but attractive, sexy woman, and a handsome young SENATOR bolt upright together, staring straight ahead, both exceedingly hungover. Their heads slowly turn to focus on CAROL, who traces a cord, in search of the phone. SALOME fights through the intense pain in her head and speaks.)

**SALOME.** Carol? When d'you get in?

*(The SENATOR flicks off Carol's tape.)*

**CAROL.** *(To SALOME:)* You're kiddin' me, right? *(Into the phone:)* Hi, could you please send a car to Crescent Heights and Norton. Billing 2976 and, listen, I'm very late for The Herb Dixon Show, okay? *(Hangs up and looks through the pile of mail.)* Salome, we had an entire conversation with dollface... *(Points to the SENATOR:)* ...last night about the decline of Congressional power in these-here nineties. I'm crushed my view meant so little to you guys...

*(SALOME stares fixedly at the SENATOR. They have absolutely no memory of the night before.)*

**SALOME.** Oh, fuck.

**SENATOR.** Oh...fuck.

**CAROL.** Yep. Don't you remember? I told you L.A.'s the first stop on my tour.

*(WENONAH watches SALOME in horror. Parade noises continue. CAROL is entranced by a color brochure from the pile of mail.)*

Holy Toledo! Laser telephone answering system with Dolby Stereo, AM-FM radio, dual compact disc, synthesized eight track recording studio, PC, TV, VCR with programmable environmental control and a sixteen-cup espresso maker ALL ROLLED INTO ONE HAND CRAFTED WALNUT WALL UNIT—just two hundred and twenty two monthly installments of \$59.99. That's unbelievable.

*(Honking is heard from outside.)*

Oh, I gotta go, my car's here. I'll talk to you, Salome, ASAP. Just take down my messages and leave 'em under my pillow. Bye, Senator. *(To WENONAH:)* Nice meetin' you Dorothy. I'll say hi to Herb Dixon, 'kay? *(Heading for the door with her boom box:)* What the heck's goin' on out there, anyway?

**WENONAH.** Uh, it's a...parade. Or so I've been told...

**CAROL.** No kiddin'.

*(CAROL punches on the recorder and exits singing. From the bed, SALOME grabs the coffee pot and pours herself a mug. She gulps it down as the SENATOR watches.)*

**SALOME.** Oh sorry, hon.

*(She pours him some.)*

**WENONAH.** Excuse me...

*(The phone rings. SALOME finds the phone cord and slowly reels it in. During the following conversation, we can hear loud cheering from the crowd outside, as the SENATOR vigorously massages his face, searching for his watch.)*

**SALOME.** Hullo? ... Hullo? ... Oh, hi ... They're lining up the floats ... Come on, I tell you this every year. The headquarters for the gay parade is right outside my window... *(Very pained expression:)* Where are you? ... They block off the roads ... In this heat? ... *(Nodding mechanically)* Flat espadrilles, lilac ... Okay, see you in five...

**SENATOR.** *(Looking at his watch:)* FUCKING WOAHH... What the hell did we do last night?

*(The SENATOR gets dressed.)*

**SALOME.** Hey, I have some groundrules. Very few. But some. One is always throw out the evidence before you pass out so you can start the day afresh. You have the kind of face that makes me want to puke.

**SENATOR.** Thanks.

**SALOME.** Partying makes *you* look charismatic.

**SENATOR.** They say Hitler was...charismatic. Learned that back in high school in conjunction with it not always being a good thing...charisma.

**SALOME.** I'm sure it's *quite* an asset.

**WENONAH.** *(Clasping her hands and taking a deep breath:)* ...My father owns this apartment.

*(KITTY enters. She is a fashionable Southern woman, wearing striped espadrilles and carrying a garment bag.)*

**KITTY.** Well, they're all just holdin' hands and singin' songs out there, carryin' on like there was no tomorrow...

**SALOME.** That was quick.

**KITTY.** I was at the phone booth on the corner. I didn't want to barge in uninvited.

*(KITTY flicks on a light switch in the room, then holds up her leg to SALOME, twirling her foot around, showing off the striped espadrilles.)*

**KITTY.** Well, these are the little devils. What d'you think, dear?

**SALOME.** Great.

**KITTY.** *(To everyone:)* We do them in pink-lilac, blue-silver, white-teal, black-mustard—that's the big trendy favorite—and brown for the borin' people.

*(The SENATOR, now dressed, holds his shoes and glances at his watch.)*

**SENATOR.** Well, uh... *(He can't remember Salome's name)* ...Darn!...

**SALOME.** No biggie, believe me. "Salome."

**SENATOR.** Right. Salome. I should roll out of here.

*(KITTY turns on her Southern charm, waiting to be introduced.)*

**SALOME.** Mother, this is Senator...uh... Well, one of California's two Senators, anyway.

**KITTY.** I'm from Tennessee.

**WENONAH.** *(Desperate:)* Hello?

*(RON, a young man, rushes in and rolls himself into a fetal position on the foot of the bed, emitting soft sounds. In horror, KITTY glances around the room and spots WENONAH, still hidden in the*

*hallway. KITTY smiles at her politely and gives a flustered wave. WENONAH clears her throat to speak.)*

**SENATOR.** *(Staring at RON:)* Should I remember him?

**SALOME.** No.

**SENATOR.** Good. Well, very charmed to meet you, Mrs....

**KITTY.** *Madison.*

**SENATOR.** Of course, Madison. A pleasure. Truly. Well, I have throngs of things to get to. Never a dull moment. If you know what I mean?

**KITTY.** I think I can imagine.

**SALOME.** She's got my wit.

*(The SENATOR smiles nervously and backs out the door. RON moans from the bed.)*

**SALOME.** He just recently got out...

**KITTY.** What?

**SALOME.** *(Lighting a cigarette:)* He tried to commit suicide about three months ago. He stayed at this great place in Santa Monica. I'm seeing *his* shrink now. Great man. Anyway, he's out now. Not the shrink. *(Pointing at RON:)* Ron's out. He's got a great job punching up sit-com jokes. He's doing really, really well. I'm very proud of him. We went through some bad times. Ron only had sex once before in his life. We made out, it was really cute, in the Cineplex movie theatre, in the afternoon, and I was pregnant before the ending credits. Remember I told you that's why I was so down—the abortion. Ron's only had sex twice and both times he got the girl pregnant. He thinks he's Clint Eastwood. He really thinks he's Clint Eastwood. That's one of the things he's in therapy about. An image problem. Anyway...

**WENONAH.** *(Brightly:)* ...I'll need a set of keys...

**RON.** I'm sorry, Mrs. Madison. I have a real hard time speaking to people I care about. I mean, people I'm supposed to care about. For years I've masked my fear in jokes. I'm a bad stand-up comedian by birth, Mrs. Madison, but I'm not practicing at present because

my...well, you know...Him...my “person.” That’s what I’m supposed to call him. Well, that’s what HE wants me to call him. HE says that I should lay off the big crowds, so I’m not working...uh, well, I am working... I’m a punch-up man, Mrs. Madison. You may have seen my TV show...“Bill and Bob”... I mean “Bob and Bill”...god damnit, “Bub and Billie.” It’s about two men who live in the same apartment, isn’t that wild!... Well, it’s a lot funnier than that...

**KITTY.** Oh my God.

*(SALOME, in bed, puts on her walkman and watches TV with no sound.)*

**RON.** I...really care about your daughter a lot, Mrs. Madison—Well, she was pregnant with my child at some point. God the poor kid... I think I love your daughter. But like HE says, you know, my “person,” the Nazi shrink. Hah, just kidding! He’s German really, but he’s not really a Nazi, though he’s known to be fascistically materialistic. Sal can vouch for that. Whenever I go over to his house—he works out of his domicile, tax write-off—fuckin’ bullshit brackets, huh? Well, I’m sitting there listening to him shoot the breeze... Somehow, he thinks talking about *his* childhood in pre-Nazi Germany is going to parallel my childhood in Tarzana—anyway, I’m dozing off listening—got twenty-five sessions covered by some medical insurance clause that opens its arms wide to suicidal attempts...

**WENONAH.** May I please use your phone?...

**RON.** BAM! MRS. MADISON! All you have to do is ATTEMPT suicide. Not COMMIT, Mrs. Madison, but attempt, and you got yourself twenty-five free sessions in some German guy’s house, slash office. And this guy doesn’t just have Perrier, he’s got Orangina, and even fleshed out the old repertoire to include cranberry juice. If you have an early meet, he’ll make you French toast with maple syrup from Vermont and all—no Aunt Jemima plastic bottles for this guy...

So anyway, getting back to sitting there listening to *him* talk, I have visions of each of my problems paying for a part of his house and he has a party, you know, and he’s showing people around the

joint. “And Ron’s *mother* contributed to repaving the driveway, and Ron’s *sex life*, or lack of one, is pretty much paying off the pool out back.” ...Wild, huh?... He knows more about my sex life than I do... Why did I get started on this, I forget? ...Oh, yeah, Sal, well, she sort of went crazy for the fascistically materialistic Nazi-shrink, said it was ‘cause he shaved his head. I used to stare at my reflection in his scalp. Real shiny. High gloss silicone finish. It’s great in the rain.

**WENONAH.** *(To herself:)* I’m using the phone.

*(WENONAH takes the phone and goes offstage to the bathroom.)*

**RON.** See, I can’t have sexual intercourse anymore, Mrs. Madison... He, him, i.e. my person, says there’s still a lot of hope. Trouble is, there’s only thirteen more sessions before I start writing the checks myself. My old man says that’s the best way to get your erection back. Totally supportive guy, my old man, Mrs. Madison, or is it, Ms. Madison. God, sorry—I’m very bad with that.

*(KITTY has crumpled into a chair, speechless. SALOME looks over.)*

**SALOME.** *(To KITTY:)* Coffee?

*(No response. The parade continues noisily.)*

**SALOME.** Mom?

*(Devastated, KITTY focuses on an empty spot on the wall.)*

**KITTY.** What happened to the pretty pastel art naïf tapestry I gave you?

**SALOME.** Well, it’s funny you mention it... Carol’s in town for her tour, by the way. She’d love to see you...

*(KITTY just stares—furious.)*

**SALOME.** Carol had it. She was staying at the Chateau and the sun was just bearing down on her through the window in the morning...so she borrowed it to shield herself... *(Groping:)* You know, she used it as a, shit, a...what’s it called?

**KITTY.** A curtain?

**SALOME.** Right, a *curtain*. And then it was really funny, I mean *she* was funny. She returns it and it's white. All the colors just faded out. It must have been made in Hong Kong. That's why she likes to stay here now. There's very little light here...

**KITTY.** I don't see any reason why the Koenig Galleries would import their wool from Hong Kong when they pride themselves on buyin' the most expensive tapestries in the world.

**SALOME.** Did you want coffee?

**KITTY.** *Please.*

*(RON moans and begins to consult the TV Guide.)*

**KITTY.** Oh dear...

**SALOME.** You should've told me you were coming into town. How are you?

**KITTY.** Between the lean cuisine zucchini diet and this year's baby quilt catalogue, it's been tedious. I wanted to surprise you.

**SALOME.** You look great. Tan.

**KITTY.** *(Angrily—trying to prove an important point:)* Well, anyone can lie themselves down on a towel, find a ridiculous piece of sun somewhere and get a goddamn tan, Salome.

**RON.** Family Feud. CBS.

**KITTY.** I just can't bear to be here.

**SALOME.** That's why you decide to trudge through West Hollywood on foot to find me?

**RON.** People's Court. NBC.

**KITTY.** *(Assessing the room:)* This little pied-à-terre has potential. I always thought you'd buy it, make it a home for yourself. A little corner, safe from the madness. I saw long green curtains, thick fabric catchin' the same color of the flowers in the bed linen. Then we'd pick up the trim color and find it over in the two armchairs. That could double as your parlor-study. Course, we want to pick up shades of that color in the area rug under the fumed glass coffee table, you've seen them before—with the metal pedestal—and do

some opaque glass cubes and raw wood for shelves. It's all well under six hundred dollars. Does the landlord have a ladder?

**SALOME.** What did we decide last time you were here, Mom?

**KITTY.** All right, I'm sorry. You're right. Just tell me what this is?

**SALOME.** Home.

*(RON ejects a tape from the VCR.)*

**KITTY.** Oh...I see.

**RON.** Able to tape 'em all?

**SALOME.** Yep.

**RON.** Weren't home last night. Who were you screwing this time?

**SALOME.** Turned the answering machine on. You okay?

**RON.** Did you get me more cranberry juice?

*(RON exits offstage to the kitchen. KITTY pulls some striped espadrilles from her bag.)*

**KITTY.** Well, here dear. I hope you enjoy them. I should go.

**SALOME.** Trust me, if I did go outside, I'd wear them. Damn straight.

**KITTY.** Please. Don't say anythin' more to me.

**RON'S VOICE.** What's this stuff?

**SALOME.** Gooseberry cranberry. New flavor. Delivered it by mistake. *(To KITTY:)* He has kidney problems.

**KITTY.** I expected as much.

**RON.** *(Enters excitedly with the bottle.)* Gooseberry cranberry? No kidding? Where's *my* mug?

**KITTY.** There's a Clint Eastwood mug that says, "Go Ahead, Make My Day" ...

**RON.** That's an old mug, Mom. *(He drinks.)* THIS IS GREAT STUFF.

**KITTY.** *(On the verge of violence:)* As in shootin' someone's brains out.

**RON.** Great stuff.

**KITTY.** *(Absently, to SALOME:)* Did you give your friend some fresh bath towels?

**SALOME.** What?

**KITTY.** *Did you give your friend some fresh bath towels?*

**SALOME.** What friend?

**KITTY.** That pretty young girl who was standin' there a second ago.

**SALOME.** What pretty young girl?

**KITTY.** The pretty young girl with the suitcase.

**SALOME.** Mother. Are you okay?

**KITTY.** Oh, you're impossible.

*(RON points to the TV. He gets nervous when people fight.)*

**RON.** Look!

**SALOME.** I just don't know what you're talking about.

**RON.** I bet molten lava leaves a hell of a burn.

**KITTY.** Forget it!

**SALOME.** Carol was here. Are you talking about Carol?

**RON.** Excuse me for interrupting, but is this "The World of Survival"?

**KITTY.** YES IT IS! *(To SALOME:)* I suppose you've forgotten?

**SALOME.** What?

**KITTY.** Thirty-five years today. Your father and I... Our wedding anniversary.

**RON.** That's not an accurate tally, Kitty. It's easy to stay married when one of the people is dead.

**SALOME.** He's gone, Ma. Been gone for a long time now.

**KITTY.** He never would've let you become a...a hermit.

**RON.** Oh no, the little Panda's stuck!

**SALOME.** I'm not a hermit.

*(WENONAH, on the phone, peeks into the room.)*

**KITTY.** Then what are you? I WANT A PROGRESS REPORT, GODDAMN IT. I want to know where that Toyota FX you're still payin' off is...

**RON.** The musk deer—shyest animal in the Himalayas.

**SALOME.** I'm working up the money to get it out of the tow yard. Better than the parking tickets I used to get on cleaning truck days. Haven't seen a fuckin' cleaning truck in years...

**RON.** Rhododendrons are edible? I didn't know that.

**KITTY.** Salome, I have a nice home. There's a pool in the downstairs patio for the tenants. We tan down there on weekends. We barbecue shishkebabs, vegetarian is possible.

**SALOME.** I'm not vegetarian.

**KITTY.** I could have sworn you were.

**SALOME.** You must have me confused with someone else.

**KITTY.** I know at least five normal men you could date. Unless you finally agree to go into business with me. I know we'd both have some great designs for baby quilts. Now it's not anythin' glamorous, Tennessee, but it's your home. Your brother has a baby there. Your father's there.

**SALOME.** She had the kid?...

**RON.** I guess you have to breathe twice as fast at that altitude.

**KITTY.** *(Glaring at RON:)* OF COURSE SHE HAD THE KID. What did you expect? Now this city is just twistin' you all up inside, Salome. I always admired your fire and your spark but you've changed...

*(CAROL rushes into the room with her tape recorder on.)*

**CAROL.** Sal, we need to talk. I found you a job.

**SALOME.** What happened?

**CAROL.** Got blocked in the parade.

**RON.** Hi, Carol. We're experiencing extreme tension in here.

**CAROL.** *(Hugging RON:)* How's my Ronnie Wannie?

**RON.** Finey, Winey.

**CAROL.** Kitty!

**KITTY.** *(Sullen:)* Carol.

*(They hug.)*

**RON.** *(To CAROL; referring to the tape player:)* These your new tunes?

*(RON starts dancing to the music. The SENATOR enters the room, wearing one shoe and carrying the other.)*

**SALOME.** Carol, you've got to get yourself more organized. You can't just miss Herb Dixon.

**CAROL.** Good instincts, Sal, good instincts.

**SENATOR.** Bix withdrew his nomination, Flynn was eliminated because of the child molestation thing...

**KITTY.** What child molestation thing?

**ALL.** YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE CHILD MOLESTATION THING?

*(WENONAH comes out of the bathroom holding the phone off the hook.)*

**KITTY.** No...

**WENONAH.** Uh, pardon me, please?...

**SENATOR.** I've got a clear shot at the environmental committee.

**SALOME.** Mother, a future Senate Committee Chairman could be standing in my house. Doesn't that make you feel better?

**WENONAH.** House?

**RON.** Mom, it's all a matter of connections. And Sal's got a lot. She slept with an Academy Award nominee.

**CAROL.** *(Correcting him:)* Winner.

**RON.** That too.

**KITTY.** *(To the SENATOR:)* DON'T YOU HAVE ANYWHERE ELSE TO BE?

**WENONAH.** I'd like to...

**RON.** He's a bachelor, Mom.

**SENATOR.** The point is...

**CAROL.** *(Finishing his sentence:)* You want to celebrate.

*(CAROL turns the music up—loud.)*

**SENATOR.** I've lost my floppy disk.

**SALOME.** *(Misunderstanding him:)* No, this is Carol's demo reel.

*(The SENATOR gets down on his hands and knees, looking under the bed. KITTY gives up and lies face down on the bed. RON dances, while CAROL sings—both oblivious to WENONAH.)*

**WENONAH.** Excuse me, my father's on the phone. EXCUSE ME MY FATHER'S ON THE PHONE! HE'S THE LEGAL OWNER HERE!

*(With the loud music, no one pays any attention to her. The SENATOR finds his floppy disk, raises it victoriously at WENONAH. Angrily, WENONAH takes the phone back into the bathroom, off-stage. The SENATOR hands SALOME, who's in bed, a string of condom packets.)*

**SENATOR.** Found these in my shoe. I'll call you later.

*(The SENATOR waves to CAROL as he exits. CAROL turns off the music.)*

**CAROL.** *(To SALOME:)* He really likes you.

*(CAROL sees KITTY, destroyed, lying face down on the bed.)*

**CAROL.** Rough red-eye, huh?

(SALOME looks at KITTY.)

**CAROL.** Is something wrong with her?

**SALOME.** She looked fine. Didn't she Ron?

**KITTY.** MY DAUGHTER SLEEPS WITH U.S. SENATORS AND CRAZY PEOPLE. I won't mention any names. I LIE AWAKE AT NIGHT WORRYIN' ABOUT MY LITTLE GIRL.

**RON.** She's hardly little, Mrs., I mean *Ms.*...

**KITTY.** Shut up. She is little. Inside that loose woman is a princess waitin' for the knight in shinin' armor who betrayed her.

**RON.** That's what I'm trying to tell her, Mrs., Miss, Ms. Madison. That's what the fascist is trying to tell her. That's what *everyone* wants to be, right? Down deep inside. A princess. That's very perceptive...

**KITTY.** Inside that Blanche Dubois cover-up is a... (*Groping*)

**CAROL.** Cleopatra?...

**RON.** Harriet Tubman?...

**KITTY.** Margaret Mead—waiting to bust out.

**SALOME.** What is this? Sybil with famous females? Can I turn up "The World of Survival" and just hang?

**KITTY.** NO YOU CANNOT TURN UP "THE WORLD OF SURVIVAL" AND JUST HANG!

**SALOME.** Watch the decibels, I'm really hungover.

**RON.** You know, this is splendid. I love the feeling of a family. Like we're all just here 'cause there's no where else we'd rather be... Great stuff...

(*He exits to the kitchen offstage.*)

**KITTY.** Lord knows what that poor boy has been deprived of...

(*Speaking to CAROL, clutching her hand.*)

“Salome”—“the peaceful one.” We had three sons. When Salome came it was like a gift from God. We had parties out on the deck. Her father, Bruno, was the most well-loved doctor in the community. We played tennis with *everyone*...

**CAROL.** I lived next door, Kitty... Bruno was my hero.

**KITTY.** *(To SALOME; accusingly:)* Carol loved him. What did he do to *you*?

**SALOME.** He was just himself.

**KITTY.** A good role model.

**SALOME.** Strong, powerful, very manly.

**KITTY.** Always right.

**SALOME.** A little too far right.

**KITTY.** I don't understand you. You used to be so simple. And a very quiet baby, who smiled a lot.

*(SALOME smiles widely at her mother. KITTY smiles back.)*

**KITTY.** Yes. Like that. It was very upliftin'...back then.

**SALOME.** Hey Ma, d'you know Betty Fargo used to live here?

**KITTY.** Betty Fargo?

**RON.** *(Entering:)* The silent film star. When sound was invented she got so scared she lost her voice. She became mute. Permanently.

**SALOME.** This used to be her parlor room. Swear to God.

*(SALOME puts on her earphones and lights a cigarette. CAROL puts her arm around KITTY, as they watch SALOME. RON watches TV.)*

**CAROL.** They just put extra money in my tour budget for a sort of personal organizer—someone to make sure I make Herb Dixon—and guess who I'm dyin' to get?

**KITTY.** You'd really hire her?

**CAROL.** Why not?

**KITTY.** Oh Carol, I'm sure Sal would make a wonderful organizer for you.

*(They both stare at SALOME, in the bed, smoking, with her headphones on.)*

**CAROL.** ...I'm sure she would.

*(KITTY picks up her garment bag.)*

**KITTY.** I should get to my next appointment. The homosexual parade must be in full swing.

**CAROL.** Gay parade, Kitty.

**KITTY.** They all look so radiantly happy.

**CAROL.** Sal, I've got a proposition. They're givin' me money for a sort of assistant while I'm on the road. New way to spend contract money. Anyway...you're it, Sal.

**SALOME.** Not over my dead body.

*(WENONAH enters with the phone.)*

**WENONAH.** EXCUSE ME?

*(Everyone turns to stare at her. She is stunned that she's finally gotten their attention. She clasps her hands together. Parade noise from the street.)*

**WENONAH.** Okay, Wenonah—assert yourself. Take a deep breath... Excuse me? My father's on the telephone. He owns this apartment. I legally have the rights to this place starting today. Now, I've discussed this with my father: the owner. He wants to talk to you.

**KITTY.** That's the young lady who needs fresh bath towels. Thank God I'm not losin' my mind...

**SALOME.** Wenonah?

**WENONAH.** It's American Indian. Wenonah means First Born Daughter in the Onondaga's language. *(She quotes:)* "Fair Nokomis bore a daughter, And she called her name Wenonah, As the first-born of her daughters." That's from Hiawatha by Longfellow. My paternal grandfather was Native American.

**SALOME.** Thanks for the info.

**KITTY.** (*Pointing to SALOME, in bed:*) She's a first-born daughter.

**WENONAH.** (*To SALOME:*) Do you want to speak to my father?

**SALOME.** Not right this second.

**WENONAH.** Well, when is the moving van getting here?

**KITTY.** The moving van?

**WENONAH.** This apartment is my belated birthday present? I own it. My attorney has sent you copies of the co-op agreement.

**RON.** (*Abruptly standing up on the bed:*) Are you moving because your job is relocating? Has your family outgrown apartment living? Maybe you just want to move before the building turns cooperative. If any of this applies to you why not give me a call. I am a private investor interested in buying your tenant's rights at a very good price. I offer flexible moving plans, no high-pressured sales pitches, and privacy. You and I will be the only ones who know you have even better financial opportunities. Why not give me a call today so we can discuss your individual situation? It won't cost you a thing and you have much to gain. Give me a call today. I'll be waiting to hear from *you*.

*(Blackout.)*

## Scene 2

*(A half hour later.*

*Parade and crowd noise. SALOME reads in bed. RON sits, eyes glued to the TV screen. CAROL, on the bed, uses a straw to snort from a small piece of paper. WENONAH enters, carrying a large pot of flowers.)*

**CAROL.** Salome likes to take plants and put them on the highest shelf she can find, to die...

**SALOME.** (*To WENONAH:*) So, your kind of neighborhood?

**WENONAH.** *(Putting down the flower pot:)* I always want flowers. I read one of those articles in one of those “women’s magazines.” It’s the best way to make a place yours, INSTANTLY.

**SALOME.** POW!

**WENONAH.** *(Brightly:)* Well! Did Abby call?

**SALOME.** Nope and I’ve been here.

**WENONAH.** *(Warningly:)* Abby can come off cold. She’s not, it’s just people interpret her personality that way. She can be snooty, I’ll admit that.

*(WENONAH takes out a large appointment/address book from her suitcase and looks at it endearingly.)*

**WENONAH.** Each year I place a Xerox copy of my appointment book in a savings deposit box in my parents’ bank in Denver. Without my contacts I’m DEAD MEAT.

*(WENONAH dials, while CAROL takes another snort from the paper.)*

**WENONAH.** Uh...is Abby Vendor there? ...Please tell her, Wenonah Missile called... Like the weapon... I just arrived in Los Angeles and I’m...getting settled... *(A pause.)* Okay, I’ll hold.

*(CAROL hands the paper and straw to SALOME.)*

**SALOME.** Ran into Gary?

**CAROL.** What could I do?

**WENONAH.** *(Speaking very quickly:)* Oh, hello Abby! How are you? I was just calling to say hi and tell you how much I’m looking forward to working with you, I just got into Los Angeles and I’m settling into my new apartment. It’s so convenient, I’m right around the corner... *(Pause.)* Oh, okay.

*(She hangs up the phone abruptly.)*

**WENONAH.** Well. She’s busy. Abby’s like that. She has so much on her mind—so much PRESSURE—IT GETS TO HER. LET’S FACE IT, IT GETS TO EVERYONE!

*(The two women stare at her.)*

**WENONAH.** That's the publishing business. *I get that way.* I watch myself get that way. CRAZED. OUT OF CONTROL!—

**SALOME.** (*Offering some to WENONAH.*) Cocaine?

**WENONAH.** —Literally BESIDE MYSELF.

**CAROL.** Cheer you up?

**WENONAH.** No. I'm fine. Do you have the yellow pages?

**SALOME.** That's why I stay away from jobs, the rejection...

**WENONAH.** Oh, it's not rejection! It's called compromise. It's called the little price you have to pay to get ahead. Because no one's going to pave the way for you—it's called perseverance. You lose ground when you forget that and take things personally. NEVER TAKE THINGS PERSONALLY...

**SALOME.** (*Interjecting.*) I take everything personally.

**WENONAH.** ...if making a six figure salary is important to you, anyway. You think I'm going to let Abby Vendor get to me? She walks all over people. Everyone knows that.

**CAROL.** Well, maybe she—Abby Vendor—walks all over people 'cause no one stands up to her...

**SALOME.** Some people like to be treated like shit, Carol.

**WENONAH.** Oh, she doesn't treat me like shit. She hired me. I start work tomorrow. We're having lunch to chat about her vision...

**RON.** (*Moved.*) What a flashback! Mr. and Mrs. Brady getting married; the ceremony and everything. All six Brady kids—the whole bunch—holding flowers. Greg was playing a guitar.

**SALOME.** You're kidding?

**RON.** Sal?

**SALOME.** Yep.

**RON.** Maybe we should tie the knot.

**WENONAH.** (*Too brightly.*) Who are your movers?

**CAROL.** (*Feeling the drug:*) God, this carpet needs some major help, NOW! Where's your super again?

**SALOME.** Hey, Ron's trying to talk to me...

**WENONAH.** Let me select a company for you.

**CAROL.** Was it twelve-D, Sal?

**SALOME.** One-F.

(*CAROL exits.*)

**SALOME.** Where would we live, Ron?

**RON.** My place?

**WENONAH.** May I use your yellow pages?

**RON.** I know it could get tough.

**SALOME.** Well, the fact that you're afraid to have sexual intercourse could be a problem...

**WENONAH.** Do you have a local directory?

**RON.** You sleep with so many people, Sal... I mean, I just tried to commit suicide three months ago.

**SALOME.** I know, Ronald.

**RON.** I really love you, Sal. I really love your spirit.

**SALOME.** I love *your* spirit, Ron, but Mr. and Mrs. Brady are a tough act to follow.

**WENONAH.** I'm going to call the police.

(*CAROL enters with a vacuum cleaner. WENONAH calls information.*)

**RON.** Yeah and there's the sex thing...

(*Loud vacuum cleaner sound, as CAROL vacuums passionately. RON moves to the TV, pouting.*)

**WENONAH.** (*Over the vacuum:*) HELLO? I'D LIKE THE NUMBER FOR THE POLICE? I HAVE AN EMERGENCY.

(*No one reacts. She hangs up and pulls the vacuum cleaner plug.*)

**SALOME.** A little coke and Carol goes into vacuum-mode.

**RON.** The fascist and I have a thing going. With your mom here and all I didn't want to bring it up.

**WENONAH.** Look, I've put this off long enough.

**SALOME.** You had sex with the Nazi?

**WENONAH.** I have a life!

**RON.** He watched.

**WENONAH.** I have tried to be friendly and I have tried to be...

**RON.** Neil Simon! *(With a Southern accent—correcting her:)* “Mr. Cornell, ah have tried to be neighborly, ah have tried to be friendly and ah have tried to be cordial...ah don't know what it is that you're trying to be...” Sorry, people do that monologue a lot at casting calls.

**WENONAH.** I'm not an avid theater goer.

**RON.** You're inventing those lines from scratch?

**WENONAH.** I own this apartment. We've been more than clear about the closing date.

**RON.** She doesn't read her mail.

**WENONAH.** Look, I have tried to be...

**RON.** Jeez, who let you into this house?

**WENONAH.** Apartment...

**SALOME.** Hearth.

**WENONAH.** What?

**SALOME.** “Pied à terre.” Lots of people crash here—I'm going to be disappointing them.

**WENONAH.** I'm trying to see your point of view. Your mother has a place with a pool and a barbecue, she's got normal men for you to meet and normal jobs for you to take.

**SALOME.** Normal?

**WENONAH.** I'm trying to make this as easy as possible on you.

**RON.** This is too trying for me.

*(CAROL reads from the dictionary.)*

**CAROL.** "Hearth: The fireside. A symbol of domestic comfort—as in, hearth and home..."

**WENONAH.** There's a fireplace?

**SALOME.** This place *is* a fireplace in the winter.

**WENONAH.** It really doesn't matter since it's going to be totally gutted.

**CAROL.** Gutted?

**WENONAH.** Pif and I are renovating.

**SALOME.** *(To RON:)* Do you think you're gay?

**WENONAH.** Why don't you join the parade and get out of my apartment? My job starts tomorrow. I need a base.

**RON.** I don't know if I'm quite ready for that.

**SALOME.** *(To CAROL:)* The Senator is dropping by later. Do you have any party clothes I could borrow?

**CAROL.** What's mine is yours. Got a gig, got to run.

**WENONAH.** You're forcing me to take drastic measures.

**RON.** I think I'll hit the sidewalk and watch.

**CAROL.** I'll go out with you. See you gals.

*(RON takes cash from his wallet and hands it to SALOME.)*

**RON.** Thanks for tapin' the shows for me...Oh and love that gooseberry.

*(CAROL puts her arm around RON comfortingly and the two exit. WENONAH stares at SALOME, sitting in bed. An awkward moment.)*

**WENONAH.** Well.

**SALOME.** ...The only thing I can really see myself doing, out there, you know, somewhere else besides here at Norton and Crescent Heights Boulevard—the center of the universe—is traveling on a Greyhound. It's cheap. No airline wars. When you're in a plane you don't see the states. You sort of drop in and out of life. I like the gas stations with only seedy types, or truck stops. Consistently great burgers. People just doing their thing. So I could travel all over the place with one of those open-ended tickets, and when I didn't like the place I'd move on. The bathrooms on the bus kind of stink and lots of the passengers smell and smoke too much. But there'd be some *people* on those busses. Not like on an airplane. You were just on a plane. From where...?

**WENONAH.** New York. The publishing world is there. Books are going to be *in*. The Written Word is spreading to the West Coast. Thanks to Abby.

**SALOME.** See any *people* on the plane?

**WENONAH.** What do you mean?

**SALOME.** Anybody make an impression?

**WENONAH.** I don't know.

**SALOME.** I don't have a good sense of what the states are doing. I'm real scared. Something to drink and some drugs, I can brave a bar where I know everyone and everyone knows me—just the way I am. How hard is it to sit at a bar and dangle a cig? I'm there every night, exactly the way I'm supposed to be. And I order a couple more drinks with whoever—famous comedians, or not-so famous ones. And then we come back here where we fuck. That's one thing I really enjoy... You say you're heading up the Written Word out here on the West Coast? The Written Word, as in books, has finally come West. Sounds like a whole bunch of birds migrating, each with a letter in its beak. Everyone wants to promote something, even if it's as basic as the Written Word. Reinventing the wheel. No one read until you and Abby. So anyway, we party, we fuck, and we wake up. Life marches on. And I scrape the money together every month 'cause rent's so cheap here. My friends know I'm here in bed when they need me...

There's something I have that no one really wants. I'm cute but my mouth gives me away. I like one-night stands. They're safe. There's only that trip across America on Greyhound because it feels real. Stopping in towns you didn't know about. Something about getting to know the people behind the statistics. I really get tired of the Gallup polls, Wenonah. God, I get so tired of the polls and the percentages. "The people are saying." I don't know what that means—"the people." I like to fuck a cross-section of people. I've found that it's easier to fuck a lot of persons than just one. I've found it hard to be alone. Carol has a voice. There's a whole life living in her voice—wherever she is, L.A., Tennessee, touring. And Ron sort of just spews out those jokes for "Billy and Buddy"—he has a tape reel in his head. He loves television. That Senator has it better yet. Good-looking. Powerful.

You definitely strike me as a winner, Winnie. Your dad is just going to stamp his little ass in here and whip it right out from under me, right? Sounds like your dad's a winner too. *I* have some bar clothes. And the Greyhound trip to get to know the people, instead of the statistics. I have a possible trip I can't afford on the cheapest means of transportation in the country. That's something, right?...

**WENONAH.** What about the baby quilts?

**SALOME.** Exactly, Wenonah. What about the baby quilts?

**WENONAH.** (*Confiding:*) You know there's this thing. Color Me Model. They pick out your palette for you, like your face is an easel, using makeup you already have, which is great, and they re-do you in a real fun way. It's low-stress, just for fun, but they're top artists in their fields. Sometimes you need that. It's a real pick-me-up. It cost me a fortune. But before, at my last publishing job, I could never fly into a room. I always had to do my homework three times because I just couldn't fly into a room, like some of the women there could... *You'd* have a shot at it—flying into a room.

**SALOME.** What does that mean? FLYING INTO A ROOM?

**WENONAH.** Taking over the room with your charisma.

**SALOME.** Oh.

**WENONAH.** Even after the Assertiveness Training I couldn't fly... Realistically speaking, when do you think you can be out?

**SALOME.** Realistically speaking?

**WENONAH.** Realistically speaking.

*(SALOME is silent.)*

**WENONAH.** Three days?... Can I ask you something? I'm just, actually, curious. I'm a curious person by nature. I really like people...

**SALOME.** Yeah?

**WENONAH.** You seem like you could be doing...something. What about waitressing, or working in one of those drive-up photo-booths. No one would bother you. Ultimately, you're just in that little booth all alone. Maybe, the manager would drive in once in a while and see if you're okay. Couldn't be that bad, though. He can't exactly hang around in his car and bother you. You could even read in there, when business is slow. How would they know? You'd be existing in a bubble unto yourself...

*(SALOME just nods.)*

**WENONAH.** The way you treat men. Sure, I know it isn't easy. *I never meet anyone...* But fundamentally, it's like you're trying to be—macho—or something. Isn't that reverse discrimination? I was just really interested. Of course, I've had the chance to observe what's going on around here—not that I consciously wanted to eavesdrop or anything...

**SALOME.** It's harder being close.

**WENONAH.** It's not like I haven't had my share of problems with men. To tell you the truth I'd rather stay home and snack haphazardly than go to dinner at a very expensive restaurant. I can't eat when I'm on display. But your sex life has already been done. In the sixties there were drugs and free love.

**SALOME.** History repeats itself.

**WENONAH.** I want to be fair. You've been here a long time.

**SALOME.** Five years.

**WENONAH.** But I did send letters. My attorney kept sending warning correspondence. The super, Duke, said he gave you notices. But you don't read your mail...

**SALOME.** Nope.

**WENONAH.** Are you sick, or something? ...Agoraphobic? "Fear of the marketplace?"

**SALOME.** It's gone way past the marketplace at this point, Winnie.

**WENONAH.** What's wrong with you?

**SALOME.** Guess we'll have to wait for the Written Word to get out here to name it.

**WENONAH.** ...I can give you a week.

**SALOME.** Okay.

**WENONAH.** I'll be staying here. There'll be people coming in and out. Pif, the designer. The architect. Maybe you should rent a Ryder truck.

**SALOME.** Betty Fargo used to greet her company in here before her mute years. She had the first floor of this building. It used to be very glitzy, with a doorman, concierge. It has the remnants of glamour—the tile in the entryway. It was another world. This was the parlor room. That's the first thing they told me about this place. It seemed I'd be in good company. With Silent Betty.

*(WENONAH clasps her hands, speaking to herself softly.)*

**WENONAH.** Take a deep breath... *(To SALOME:)* A week. I'll need a set of keys.

*(SALOME takes a key chain, within reach from the bed, and gives it to WENONAH.)*

**SALOME.** Welcome, Winnie.

**WENONAH.** Maybe we should draw up a contract.

**SALOME.** Jesus.

**WENONAH.** How am I supposed to trust you?

*(SALOME picks up one of CAROL's party dresses, from the side of the bed.)*

**SALOME.** A week.

**WENONAH.** Well... I'll be back in a while...

**SALOME.** I have someone coming over later.

**WENONAH.** I live here.

*(Blackout.)*

*In a pool of light, CAROL performs the song, "Temporary," for the audience, during the scene change.)*

**CAROL.** I can be yours tonight,  
And it'll be all right  
But by tomorrow just a memory  
Temporary, it's temporary  
What you see, is what you get  
Let's have no regret  
I can't give you any guarantee  
Temporary, it's temporary  
Take me for a joy ride. C'mon, let's start.  
Tonight it's only you and me.  
Baby, I know you don't want to break my heart.  
The only way is if it's temporary.  
Pity on fools who dream,  
Life is what it seems,  
Love's no substitute for honesty.  
Temporary, it's temporary, it's temporary.

### Scene 3

*(That night. A cigarette lighter flickers in the dark. Low lights come up.)*

*SALOME, in the party dress, and the SENATOR are drunk. They sit together on the bed drinking from a bottle.)*

**SALOME.** ...Really, what is your name? I'd like to be able to refer to you correctly...down the road. Your face looks so familiar. It's a very memorable face.

*(He laughs, handing her the bottle.)*

**SALOME.** Two. Twice. Once and then again. In between there was time to think.

**SENATOR.** Kennedy.

**SALOME.** Kennedy.

**SENATOR.** The very distant cousin?

**SALOME.** Oh, that must be tough.

**SENATOR.** Call me, Michael—George—or Cliff. Or Bob.

**SALOME.** "The Senator from California." You were pointed out to me that way. I love the way that sounds. We should go...

**SENATOR.** You're a real party animal...

**SALOME.** An animal, maybe—but never a party. I like to go to them, and I like *to party*. But I'm not, myself, a party.

*(She kisses him. He responds.)*

**SENATOR.** Why not?

**SALOME.** Twice. With the Senator... I'd really like to get out of here for a while...

**SENATOR.** I thought we could maybe just talk.

**SALOME.** There's really nothing I could possibly say to you. Hip hip hooray for abortion, damn that deficit. You don't want to listen to people. You listen to your staff—like you listen to the Gallup polls. I hate the band-wagon. And those metal credit card things—where they take the imprint of your numbers. *(Mimicking a credit card machine)* I hate that sound.

**SENATOR.** You hate a lot. What does that have to do with Gallup polls?

**SALOME.** You talk too much.

**SENATOR.** Come on, I know you're more than a cheap fuck.

*(He starts to kiss her. She responds. He stops and stares at her.)*

**SALOME.** What about that party?

**SENATOR.** What if I asked you to Washington? Put you up in a big suite with a white ceramic tile bathroom as big as this whole place. Make the bathtub your bed. And you could be the voice of the people whispering in my ear.

**SALOME.** Law of the jungle. "One-night stands mean just that. One." I'm slipping today. My routine is all screwed up.

**SENATOR.** *I* have the one-night stands.

**SALOME.** That must be my problem. I'm a woman with a man's mind. And you like me a lot 'cause I don't want to be the first lady. I don't want to fuck you for what you know and where you've been.

**SENATOR.** What are you doing here anyway?

**SALOME.** Holding down the fort while I still can.

**SENATOR.** I'm going to tell you the truth, Salome. Strange name.

**SALOME.** Call me, cheap fuck.

**SENATOR.** I'm telling you the truth.

**SALOME.** What about?

**SENATOR.** Today something clicked.

**SALOME.** Oh great.

**SENATOR.** Why don't you come back with me?

**SALOME.** What are you talking about?

**SENATOR.** Your average woman...

**SALOME.** You've had a few too many—

**SENATOR.** ...She doesn't talk about Gallup polls.

**SALOME.** You can't afford it, Cliff.

**SENATOR.** What?

**SALOME.** The woman with the perspective.

**SENATOR.** It's growing on me.

**SALOME.** What's growing on you?

**SENATOR.** You.

**SALOME.** We all have our little rules. Never more than once.

**SENATOR.** Look, *I* never come back, Salome. That's the way it usually works.

**SALOME.** Oh, so does this mean you're in love?

*(The SENATOR gets up from the bed.)*

The problem with you is you're too used to being a conduit...

*(SALOME gets up.)*

**SALOME.** We should go.

**SENATOR.** Can't you see what you're doing? ...Surrounding yourself with morons.

**SALOME.** Hey!

**SENATOR.** Cowards.

**SALOME.** That's better...

**SENATOR.** When are you going to face the facts. Dress up. Do your hair.

**SALOME.** You make me sound like Eva Peron.

**SENATOR.** Don't think I don't know how it feels to have no faith.

**SALOME.** Are we going or not? Time is burning a hole...

*(He shakes her.)*

**SENATOR.** We're the same. I look in your eyes and I see myself. The last of a long string of heroes.

*(They stare at each other. SALOME backs down onto the bed.)*

**SALOME.** I'm tired.

**SENATOR.** Let's go.

**SALOME.** You go.

**SENATOR.** Come on.

**SALOME.** I'm bushed.

*(SALOME lies down on the bed and covers herself with the sheets.)*

**SENATOR.** First time I saw this place I was so high I thought the flowers on the sheets were jumping out and caressing me. Until I finally realized it was your hands on my body. Then the bed took off into the sky and I thought it was the drugs. We were flying over those lush jungles in the Philippines with the houses on stilts made of bark. Flying over the dark blue water. The phone rang. You picked it up. We came crashing down. A magnet. "I can stay here," I thought. And then everything became still. Like hell. You were the drug. That's when you know you've fallen for the wrong woman. The last Southern Belle, or a shadow of one.

*(He touches her, lingers a moment then moves towards the door.)*

**SENATOR.** I know you can hear me, babe.

*(He exits.)*

*After a moment, SALOME sits up. She stares off, expressionless. Lights a cigarette. Takes a swig from the bottle. A beat.*

*WENONAH enters, carrying some shopping bags.)*

**WENONAH.** Hi...

**SALOME.** Hi.

**WENONAH.** This is really tricky.

**SALOME.** What?

**WENONAH.** Kicking someone out.

**SALOME.** Oh.

**WENONAH.** You're just a renter, you have no rights. What are you going to do?

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(WENONAH exits offstage to the bathroom.)

**SALOME.** Well, I've had a lot of offers today, Winnie. Vegetarian shishkebabs in Nashville, picking up towels on the road, a bathtub in Washington D.C., marriage inspired by the Brady Bunch. Nothing seems *quite* right.

**WENONAH'S VOICE.** Can you, actually, afford to be particular?

**SALOME.** It kind of threw me. I'm not used to this much happening. I had this day dedicated to nursing a hangover.

(WENONAH, now in her night clothes, enters with an alarm clock and sets it.)

**SALOME.** What is that?

**WENONAH.** An alarm clock.

**SALOME.** Oh, yeah.

**WENONAH.** Well, if you don't mind I'll...climb in...?

**SALOME.** No.

**WENONAH.** No?

**SALOME.** Sure.

**WENONAH.** Sure?

**SALOME.** I don't mind.

(WENONAH gets in on the opposite side as SALOME.)

**WENONAH.** I always admired him.

**SALOME.** Who?

**WENONAH.** That Senator from California.

**SALOME.** It's hard.

**WENONAH.** What?

**SALOME.** Following in someone's shadow.

**WENONAH.** Oh.

**SALOME.** It's there. Always on one side or the other. Takes up almost all your energy...

**WENONAH.** Well, good night.

**SALOME.** (*Groping:*) ...just to turn your head away and change—come up with something original—brand new. People want to cling to the old glory...

**WENONAH.** It's good sometimes...

**SALOME.** What?

**WENONAH.** Something brand new.

**SALOME.** Of course it's good. It's essential, that's not the point... It's hard, Winnie.

**WENONAH.** That's really not my name.

**SALOME.** Sorry, I can't deal with the other one. It's a tongue twister.

**WENONAH.** Good night, Salome.

**SALOME.** Sleep tight.

*(Lights cross-fade to CAROL, who performs "Jet Lag Hotel," in a pool of light.)*

*(During the song KITTY slowly opens the door, casting a shaft of light across the room. She enters with a large, oversized bust of a man. She positions the bust at the foot of the bed, then tiptoes out.)*

**CAROL.** Spinnin' over the northern lights

You're flyin' way too high.

Arrival time is overdue

You found no friendly sky.

So come in for a landin'

I'll meet you at the gate

And take you to a place I know

Where we can check in late.

Check it out, baby, check in with me.

Check it out, there's a big old bed

With a big old vacancy.

No desk clerk will ever see your face  
You can disappear without a trace.  
You can lay low for a spell at the Jet Lag Hotel.

What's an hour, what's a day  
When you're up in the air?  
The Jet Lag's in a time zone where  
There's always time to spare  
So crash out at the Jet Lag  
Don't worry 'bout the price.  
The only charge you'll get  
Is on the way to paradise.

Check it out, baby, check in with me.  
Check it out, there's a big old bed  
With a big old vacancy.  
No desk clerk will ever see your face.  
You can disappear without a trace.  
You can lay low for a spell at the Jet Lag Hotel.  
You can lay low for a spell at the Jet Lag Hotel.

*(CAROL finishes her song, enters the apartment, done for the night,  
and gets into the bed.*

*Lights fade.)*

***End of ACT I***

## ACT II

### Scene 1

*(The next morning.)*

*Alarm clock goes off in darkness. SALOME slowly rises from sleep, annoyed by the sound. CAROL is dead to the world on the other side of the bed. Light from the bathroom illuminates the bust of the man's head.*

*From the bed, SALOME slams off the ringing clock, then notices the bust. She moves down the bed towards it and stares. She places a scarf over it. WENONAH, hair still wet from the shower, enters and switches on the light. Dressed in an executive suit, WENONAH holds a pill bottle. She looks to the bust.)*

**WENONAH.** What is that by the way?

**SALOME.** Dressing for success I see...

*(WENONAH downs a pill, consulting her directory and dials.)*

**WENONAH.** Xanax...it's a muscle relaxant...

**SALOME.** Feel free to use my phone.

*(WENONAH listens. She hangs up, beaming.)*

**WENONAH.** Seventy two degrees all day. I guess that means no overcoat.

**SALOME.** What are the surf conditions?

**WENONAH.** It never rains, does it? *(Seeing CAROL; whispering:)* I didn't realize she was still here.

**SALOME.** Carol could sleep through a herd of elephants ransacking her plane.

**WENONAH.** Well, I do hope you're planning to make lots of phone calls today about getting this stuff packed up.

**SALOME.** If your father's so rich why don't you stay in a hotel? What happens when they gut the place?

**WENONAH.** Then I'll stay somewhere else. For now, I'm just trying to get it cleared out. I'm sorry. You're just going to have to learn to help yourself. If I started worrying about all the miserable people in the world, where would I be? I didn't mean you were miserable. You have to help yourself before you can start helping others. My father gives money to Native Americans now. Because he worked so hard. Ultimately, this whole area is up for renovation.

**SALOME.** Well, any minute now people will be arriving for my Tuesday morning orgy. You're welcome to stay.

**WENONAH.** I'm not kidding. If nothing's changed when I get back tonight, I'll have to call the police.

*(RON enters carrying a briefcase and take-out bags.)*

**SALOME.** Right on schedule.

**RON.** Bisexual. Homosexual. Heterosexual...

**WENONAH.** I should go.

*(She gathers her work materials.)*

**RON.** ...Necrophiliac—with dead people. With sheep, forgot the name for that. Nympho—you know, like all the time, day or night. In a garage with the car running—masturbating with the car exhaust asphyxiating you. Seahorses, black widows—you hear about them all the time. All those incredible possibilities and I'm Asexual. Nothing, zip, zero, nada. Yesterday, I had the single most successful sexual experience of my life. I was standing on the sidewalk with the crowd from the parade. Someone shoved me up against a fire hydrant, and I was practically straddling it. All of a sudden, literally out of the blue, it starts spurting forth in an enthusiastic love stream. Talk about spontaneity. Talk about responding to the moment. Talk about God trying to tell me something.

**WENONAH.** Maybe he could lend you some money.

*(RON notices the bust for the first time.)*

**RON.** I thought we could do breakfast before "Billy and Buddy." What's that?

**SALOME.** I know who it is but I'm not sure why he's here.

**RON.** Can I look?

**SALOME.** Suit yourself.

*(RON lifts the scarf. CAROL wakes.)*

**RON.** God, what a distinguished looking person...

*(RON raises the bust so it appears the bust's head is on RON's body.)*

**CAROL.** HOLY SHIT! BRUNO!

*(She covers her face with the sheets.)*

**RON.** Bruno?

**WENONAH.** Bruno?

**CAROL.** Damn, I forgot how handsome he was. *(Uncovering herself:)* What is he doin' here?

**RON.** Who is he?

**CAROL.** He was part Lebanese or somethin', right Sal? Always tan and wearin' tennis clothes. All the girls on our block had a crush on him. Once Sal and I tipped over her aquarium and it smashed all over Sal's head...

**SALOME.** *You* tipped it over, Carol. On purpose.

**CAROL.** All the goldfish just came streamin' out onto her hair and flopped all over the rug. She had this gash on her temple, not that bad really. It just looked bad.

**RON.** But who is he?

**SALOME.** Eight stitches isn't bad, Carol?

**CAROL.** He and Kitty were playin' tennis. What else? That's all they ever did and Bruno came runnin' in and got blood all over his white clothes. Kitty too. It was just precisely the wrong thing to be wearin' for that kind of an accident. They took Sal to the hospital, no big deal.

**SALOME.** You almost killed me.

**RON.** Who is he?

**CAROL.** But Salome's dad was always my hero. So slick even with that bright red blood all over his tennis shorts. He had a heart attack. God, Bruno was exactly the wrong person to have one. Real healthy, young, happy. That was the big talk 'round our street—how he was just the wrong person for a coronary. They say it's hereditary.

**RON.** Like everyone in my family is *asexual*. Makes sense.

**WENONAH.** There's no history of heart disease in my family.

**SALOME.** Isn't it about time you saved the west from illiteracy?

**WENONAH.** As I said—(*Looking to RON and CAROL:*)—and you are my witnesses. If I don't see signs of packing when I get back this evening, I'll have to call the police. Unfortunately, you've left me only that recourse.

*(A silence.)*

**WENONAH.** Wish me luck.

*(No response. WENONAH exits. SALOME slowly rearranges the scarf over the bust.)*

**RON.** What a fart face.

**SALOME.** Come on, guys. It'll work out.

**CAROL.** The offer to be my personal assistant still stands. My tour's goin' to all the major cities. New York's next.

**SALOME.** Wake up, Carol. Me?

**CAROL.** Sure.

*(RON laughs.)*

**RON.** Sorry.

**CAROL.** Think about how concerned you were about me missin' Herb Dixon.

**SALOME.** I wasn't concerned, Carol. I just thought you were dumb.

**CAROL.** That's sort of the same as concern.

**SALOME.** No it's not.

**CAROL.** You wouldn't really have to do anythin'. And you'd draw a salary. Maybe you'd make a couple of phone calls for me when I'm tourin'. Get me some take-out food.

*(Fuming, SALOME lights a cigarette.)*

**CAROL.** Hey. Excuse me. *(To RON:)* She was always the one people thought was goin' to be successful in high school. All the guys swarmed to her like bees to honey. I hated it.

**SALOME.** I think I need to be by myself now.

**RON.** Are you okay?

**SALOME.** Sure.

**RON.** I could lend you some dough, Sal. You can crash out at my pad.

**CAROL.** Hey, why not, Sal?

**SALOME.** Because Ron's apartment has black leather wallpaper, Carol. It's like living in a cheap, velvet jewelry box. Except for the wide-screen color TV, everything is black. The only real point of interest is his dead bird collection. I'm already depressed enough.

**CAROL.** Oh.

**RON.** It's my castle. Don't knock it.

**CAROL.** Stay at the Chateau for a while on my tab.

**SALOME.** I need to get some sleep. I dream about serpents all night, "what-ya-ma-call-it" wakes me at seven and I find a bust of my father at the foot of my bed. Freud would be in heaven.

**RON.** He already is and he's very happy with his patients up there. He finally gets to psychoanalyze his mom and dad.

**SALOME.** Never underestimate boredom.

*(SALOME switches off the light and gets under the covers.)*

**RON.** *(To CAROL:)* They're going to evict her. Throw her to the dogs.

**CAROL.** Maybe she should go home with Kitty.

**RON.** She can't leave.

**CAROL.** What is she supposed to do?

**SALOME.** You guys, I'm trying to sleep.

**CAROL.** *(To RON:)* I'm rehearsin'. I have an all-day session.

**RON.** I need one. How is she going to move this bed?

**CAROL.** How'd she ever get it in here in the first place?...

**RON.** *(Getting emotional:)* Beats me. You know, the poor, dumb ghost of Betty Fargo roams this apartment...

**CAROL.** You saw her?

**RON.** Sequined gowns, real pale face. I'm going to miss her.

*(RON looks at SALOME's form in the bed and sits down next to her.)*

**RON.** ...she's the only person I know who lets me be me. Maybe, I just feel better about my life when I see hers.

*(RON places his hand on the sheet.)*

**CAROL.** *(Softly:)* Yeah, it makes you feel more successful...

*(CAROL sits on the bed.)*

**RON.** Successful? What do you mean?

**SALOME.** I'm not dead, guys... It's just a hole in the wall... Carol, Ron made that up about Betty Fargo's ghost.

**RON.** I did not.

**SALOME.** When did you see her ghost?

**RON.** All the time.

**SALOME.** Where was I?

**RON.** *(Fighting tears:)* You're my Betty Fargo.

**SALOME.** You're selling yourself short, Ron. Betty Fargo was glamour incarnate.

**RON.** If I could love a woman it would be you, Sal. But right now, I'm just a man with an image problem who writes bubbly lines for "Billy and Buddy."

**CAROL.** We'll let you get some shut-eye, Sal.

**RON.** We'll let you get some shut-eye, Betty.

*(CAROL nudges RON and they exit. SALOME stretches out from under the covers and grabs a large pile of mail from the heap. She examines the return addresses. KITTY enters with her garment bag and looks at the bust. She switches on the light, then pulls the scarf off the bust.)*

**KITTY.** Lillian Ruderman made it. I was just so touched. Isn't it beautiful? They weren't even goin' to show it to me. Your father loved Lillian and Bill. We had a lovely dinner together. Bill is usually in India when I'm in town, so it was the first night the three of us really had time to just sit 'n' drink 'n' talk. Lillian confessed she'd worked on this one piece for years but been baffled by what to do with it. She didn't want to "put it on exhibit" until I'd at least seen it, and she just didn't feel she could show it to me. She thought it would be morbid. Well, I suppose it is, in a way. But we drank some more and talked about all the old times and Bruno's... "way" ... Well, just about Bruno, when he was here with us. Memories of this and that, nothin' spectacular. Until we sort of conjured Bruno up, as one does in a séance. He just appeared. And it wasn't bad like it usually is... to remember him. He was just there with us at the table, smilin' because he always loved Lillian's cookin'. Then Bill suggested to Lillian maybe there was somethin' I might want to see. Lillian blushed and looked a little angry at Bill. I've never seen her behave that way toward him—she's usually so proper and well-mannered. She pushed back her chair and led me down the stairs. At that point, I was very nervous. I said to myself, for God's sake what are they doin' takin' me down to the basement in the middle of dinner? It was so strange the three of us descendin' silently into the lower depths... And there he was. I was just so surprised to see him, Salome, and of course impressed. Which is a ridiculous way to feel about your own husband. Bill couldn't resist mentionin' the parallel with John the Baptist, which is just like Bill. But it was all really much more simple than I can tell you, Salome.

It's a shame Lillian isn't a painter, she could have eternalized him in oil.

*(KITTY sits down on the edge of the bed and takes SALOME's hand.)*

**KITTY.** And I did want you to see him. What is that you're readin', dear?

**SALOME.** Eviction letters.

**KITTY.** You'll have to move on now, won't you? ...Well... You've always been somewhat of a dreamer... I don't know what it is that makes me the enemy...

*(WENONAH enters, carrying a bag of cleaning supplies.)*

**KITTY.** At least give me a clue, Salome. You turned away from us all...

**SALOME.** It just wasn't my scene.

*(WENONAH tensely takes out air freshener and starts spraying the room.)*

**KITTY.** Darlin', no aerosol spray is goin' to cut through the cloud of doom in this room.

**SALOME.** What happened to the Written Word?

**WENONAH.** Abby Vendor said I should just carry you outside with my own bare hands and put you down on the sidewalk.

**SALOME.** You didn't answer my question.

**WENONAH.** I called the designer. We've done a lot of the work by mail. Consequentially, he could show up anytime.

**SALOME.** What about your job? I thought you were working today.

**WENONAH.** It'd be favorable if when he gets here this place was in some semblance of order. People get uncomfortable when they see someone lying in bed during the day. They assume the person is sick and it might be contagious. It doesn't make them feel very welcome.

**KITTY.** (*Assessing the room again:*) It's funny, I always thought this place had enormous potential. I'd die to hear some of your ideas, dear. I'm a decorator, myself.

**SALOME.** Oh great.

**WENONAH.** Let me show you some of our designs.

(*SALOME resumes looking at letters. WENONAH takes out a blueprint and refers to different parts of the apartment.*)

**WENONAH.** We'd like to extend this wall out a bit, cage in this area and turn it into a Breakfast-Aviary. See, I just love birds...

**SALOME.** Who doesn't?

**KITTY.** Oh, that's phenomenal. Breakfast with the birds!

**WENONAH.** We're thinking of doing this floor in Israeli marble—that sort of real pale sienna marble. It's perfect for floors because it's more durable. So we'd run it through the kitchen all the way down here, and let it come up the wall a little bit, making a border on each side of the bird cage. In addition, what we thought might be especially riveting, is to bring back the sienna marble into the cage itself. Add trickling water over sandstone to create an earthy, rain forest effect in this corner, letting the water collect into a wishing pool in one of those Florentine scallops, like the one Venus emerges from in the Botticelli. I'd kill for a little granite birdbath to match the scallop...

**SALOME.** Jesus...

**WENONAH.** Speaking of Botticelli, I simply love the colors in the Spring painting. I want to get a similar muted wallpaper with imprints on the top border... For the sink and counter, we're considering that new stuff that is sort of a cross between plastic and acrylic. They say you can do practically anything under the sun to it...

**KITTY.** Yes, I hear "Corian" is absolutely wonderful. A jiffy to clean and it lasts and lasts. I have a friend who is very happy...

**WENONAH.** Which brings us out to here, where Pif, my designer, assures me we can ostensibly do a fireplace, if we can just get around the codes. (*Pointing to another wall:*) Here, we're stuck. Pif

thought about a neon strip extending the length of this wall, but I just hate neon. He suggested just the bare bulb, a glass tube that doesn't light up. That's better, but I still hate it...

**SALOME.** UUHHHH.

**KITTY.** What about a long, rectangular aquarium, that fits snug with the wall? I know it might fight with the aviary but if you picked one basic tropical fish color, turquoise is nice, and put white dune sand at the bottom? And of course, the tank lights up at night—and some of those exotic fish glow in the dark. The birds would love it.

**WENONAH.** I've never seen that, it's so Georgia O'Keeffe. (*Patting KITTY on the shoulder:*) I love Nouveau New Mexico.

**SALOME.** I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS! IT'S JUST A MEASLY STUDIO. WHAT'S WRONG WITH IT JUST THE WAY IT IS? YOU'RE TURNING IT INTO A ZOO!

**WENONAH.** (*To KITTY:*) Of course, it's probably not the greatest time to talk about these ideas.

**SALOME.** You really missed your calling. You should have been her daughter.

(*KITTY and WENONAH consider this.*)

**KITTY.** Well, I should get to the airport now...

(*KITTY goes over to the bust.*)

**KITTY.** Lillian offered to have Guillermo...the gardener come over and pick it up. She insisted on having it shipped back to Nashville for me. He should be here later this afternoon to get it. Well... (*She extends her hand to WENONAH.*) It was certainly a pleasure to meet you. Best of luck with the place—it sounds smashin', dear.

**WENONAH.** We can only hope. Thanks for that great fish-tank concept.

**KITTY.** Well, goodbye, dear. Do let me know where you are... At some point...

**SALOME.** Sure.

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*(KITTY takes a final look at the bust and leaves. SALOME covers it back up with the scarf.)*

**SALOME.** So?

**WENONAH.** *(Looking around the room:)* Nothing's different.

**SALOME.** You never answered my question, before.

*(WENONAH starts unloading the other cleaning products from the bag.)*

**WENONAH.** You're obviously not the kind of person you can talk to. I checked with the police. I know the legal procedure.

**SALOME.** I found your eviction letters. I just wanted to make sure you were for real. *(No answer.)* Your dad sounds very rich. *(Still no answer.)* Is that really going to happen, all that reconstruction? The aviary, the acrylic sink? I can't really imagine it. Betty would be proud. You and Abby can have tea in the breakfast nook and discuss all the great works of literature winging their way out West, over the pleasant din of chirping birds. And then Betty Fargo's ghost will rise from the Venus scallop, in the mist of the rainforest. It will be a perfect picture. Betty as Venus.

Her best role yet. The goddess of love. Abby will jump up from the breakfast nook and scream bloody murder because she thinks she saw someone standing in the birdbath. I can't imagine that Abby likes ghosts. I don't know how ghosts react when their home is gutted. You'll just have to wait and see, I guess.

**WENONAH.** The department is slimming down. Abby says to try back in six months. She's very optimistic.

**SALOME.** Abby sounds like an asshole.

**WENONAH.** She's just very overworked. It makes people insane. It will be good. She says this'll give me some time to get settled. She says this is a hard city to adjust to.

**SALOME.** Because New York is a piece of cake?

**WENONAH.** Since I won't be going to work right away, I'd like to get moving on the renovation. To speed up the whole process I'll

help you move. I've decided to foot the bill for you... I'll write it off as charity.

**SALOME.** That's all right.

*(SALOME grabs a jacket, keys and heads for the door.)*

**WENONAH.** I insist.

**SALOME.** *(Exiting:)* I don't want your help, Winnie.

**WENONAH.** It's deductible...

*(Blackout.)*

*In a pool of light, CAROL performs, "Rockin' You Slowly.")*

**CAROL.** I'm rockin' you slowly right out of my mind;  
I'm gonna forget you and leave you behind.  
I'll make you a mem'ry too distant to see  
So I can't remember what you mean to me.

I'm rockin' you slowly  
Right out of my dreams.  
Once I needed you only,  
But no longer it seems.

I'm rockin' you slowly  
Right out of my heart.  
I'm better off lonely.  
I've gotta be strong, gotta be brave, gotta be smart.

I'm rockin' you slowly right out of my arms;  
I'm through bein' lied to and fooled by your charms.  
I'll make you a mem'ry too distant to see  
So I can't remember what you mean to me.

I'm rockin' you slowly  
Right out of my dreams.  
Once I needed you only,  
But no longer it seems.

I'm rockin' you slowly  
Right out of my heart.  
I'm better off lonely.

I've gotta be strong, gotta be brave, gotta be smart.

I'm rockin' you slowly right out of my mind;

I'm gonna forget you and leave you behind.

I'll make you a mem'ry too distant to see

So I can't remember what you mean to me, what you mean to me.

## Scene 2

*(Many hours later, early evening.)*

*The bust as before. WENONAH, wearing cleaning clothes, rubber gloves and holding a toilet brush, pulls back the curtain and looks out the window. She anxiously sits on the bed and fidgets, glancing at her watch. She returns to the window and looks out, as RON enters dressed in a Batman suit. He steps onto the bed behind her, spreading his cape. She turns around and screams. He approaches. She takes a closer look.)*

**WENONAH.** ...Oh, it's you.

**RON.** Network party.

*(RON exits to the kitchen. WENONAH stares after him.)*

**RON'S VOICE.** We're out of cranberry juice, man.

*(WENONAH goes back to the window and looks out. CAROL hurries in with her boom box. WENONAH turns, disappointed to see CAROL.)*

**CAROL.** Got a late show tonight.

*(CAROL partially undresses.)*

**WENONAH.** Have you seen Salome?

**CAROL.** I sure haven't. She go out?

**WENONAH.** ...Yeah.

**CAROL.** Well, she's never gone more than ten, fifteen minutes.

**WENONAH.** *(Worriedly:)* Never?

**CAROL.** Nope. (*CAROL slips into bed.*) I'm gonna take a teeny-weeny cat-nap. Will you wake me in a couple 'o hours?

**WENONAH.** Sure...

(*CAROL snuggles into the bed. A noise at the door. WENONAH ducks behind the bed's headboard.*)

*SALOME, smoking a cigarette, enters and sees the bust.*)

**SALOME.** Shit.

(*SALOME gingerly starts to lift the scarf off the bust. Caught off guard, she stiffens when WENONAH appears from behind the headboard.*)

**WENONAH.** (*Overly casual:*) Oh, hi...

(*SALOME replaces the scarf.*)

**SALOME.** You're still here. Anyone call?

**WENONAH.** No... Well, my dad called...

(*SALOME finds the liquor bottle, pours herself a drink.*)

**SALOME.** Dow Jones skyrocketing?

**WENONAH.** (*Defensively:*) My family's owned a couple of apartments on this street for years. This is a low priority property, it's not costing us a thing. They're happy to do me a favor... (*Clasping hands, taking a deep breath.*) I'm not going to feel guilty about this, okay?... (*A beat.*) You're back.

**SALOME.** Took a walk down to Mayfair. The grocery store you went to? They're open twenty four hours. They close off the liquor department at two AM and open it back up at six AM. They have this wire cage that lowers down around the liquor department. People—Barbarians—same thing. It's a circus out there on the Boulevard. I stayed in the store for a while, got a cup of coffee and hung out in the deli—it's not a great deli—better off going to Murrey's. I have a check cashing card at Mayfair, though.

(*SALOME reclaims her territory, getting into the bed beside CAROL.*)

**SALOME.** This bed, Winnie. How could I move? It's just so god-damned big. I was going out with this famous stand-up comedian who hired a moving company to move me out of his apartment. That's when I bought it. After we broke up. They moved it in for me. *He* paid. He was really anxious to get me out of his place. I thought we'd get married but he thought he was Woody Allen...

**CAROL.** *(Sleepily:)* You wouldn't believe this guy. He had one of those cardboard boxes of Chablis with a little plastic spigot. Permanent fixture in his fridge, like some people have a water cooler...

**SALOME.** Rhine Wine was his favorite thing in the world. It fed his fire...

**CAROL.** He couldn't tell the difference between his life and a rock video. Where the women just float around in dry ice.

**SALOME.** *(Nodding:)* With lots of makeup and fans whipping their hair around. I really hate that.

*(SALOME looks at the bust.)*

**SALOME.** Well, looks like Bruno won't leave either. I guess the gardener blew me off. Poor Guillermo. I wonder what he looks like after fifteen years. Got high with him when I was fourteen—we were out here from Nashville on a family visit. Bruno found us in the pool shed. Caused a major scandal. Me with the Mexican gardener in the shed, smoking.

*(WENONAH sits on the edge of the bed, picks up the liquor bottle and takes a deep swallow.)*

**WENONAH.** Well, whenever there's a problem my dad writes a check...

**SALOME.** Tough life.

**WENONAH.** Which I always end up cashing... That's how we communicate.

*(Upset, WENONAH takes another sip.)*

**SALOME.** Bad phone call?

**WENONAH.** You know what I did back in New York?

*(RON enters from the kitchen. SALOME stares at his Batman costume.)*

**RON.** Network party.

**WENONAH.** You know what I did back in New York?

**RON.** *(To SALOME:)* You're out of cranberry juice, man.

**WENONAH.** Could you please ask me, "What?"

**SALOME.** I'm sorry. "What?"

**WENONAH.** It's really embarrassing.

**CAROL.** I doubt it.

**WENONAH.** ...I joined the Armed Forces and went to North Carolina.

**RON.** You've got to be kidding.

*(RON, SALOME and CAROL stare at WENONAH.)*

**WENONAH.** I called the number on TV. They were very nice. They came to my apartment. Really fast. They were so friendly. I mean it was just so good to be around someone optimistic and supportive. Who's sure you're making the right decision and being one hundred percent encouraging. None of the usual head-trips. You could really tell they wanted me. It wasn't just a put-on. **THAT FELT SO GREAT. TO BE WANTED.**

**SALOME.** Of course they wanted you.

**RON.** You're self-destructive.

**CAROL.** How'd you get out of there?

**WENONAH.** My family. I couldn't face going back to New York. Abby Vendor was supposed to save my life...

**SALOME.** Your tribe did.

**WENONAH.** They just throw money at me.

**RON.** Better them than the Armed Forces.

**WENONAH.** At least the Army cares.

**SALOME.** Hey, what about the Venus birdbath? The turquoise fish swimming snug with the wall?

**RON.** You gals should room it, man.

**SALOME.** From whence this surge of confidence?

**RON.** BATMAN, man. Get in the groove.

**SALOME.** Right.

**RON.** Like just cruise control it. Get a grip.

**SALOME.** Cruise control it?

**CAROL.** Get a grip?

**RON.** People talk this way, lover. There's a cornucopia of expressions to choose from. HE, Nazi shrinkman, says, "Steal them. Rip 'em off. Try to find your Personal Voice."

**CAROL.** How can it be personal if you're stealin' it from someone else?

**RON.** Hey, nothing's original, beauty.

*(CAROL snuggles back under the covers.)*

**SALOME.** HE, Nazi shrinkman, sounds like he's grasping at straws.

**WENONAH.** ...In New York—before I called the toll-free number?

**RON.** He says we're all primitive scavengers. Robbin' from each other. Searchin' for our own private bonanza... I really want that bonanza, man. Sorry, I mean "woman"... "Women." *(To SALOME:)* Get my shows, goddess?

*(With a Batman flourish, RON goes to the VCR. WENONAH tries to continue her conversation with SALOME, who sits near the bust.)*

**WENONAH.** ...In New York—before I called the toll free number? For the Armed Forces. I started sleeping out on my fire escape. It was some kind of test. Seeing if I could make it through the night. What was beautiful about being out there were the gradations of color in the sky. The blue. And I'd drink a lot of Diet Coke and

watch the blue turn black. Because nothing was making sense about the city and my job. Everyone was walking on tiptoes waiting to get control. I'd drag the TV to the window ledge, after the blue tinge disappeared. That's when I saw the ad, the toll-free number flashing its beacon in the night. It all looked so purposeful.

*(WENONAH cries, clutching her large appointment/address book and trying to keep her sobbing quiet. SALOME is oblivious, as she lifts off the scarf and stares at the bust. RON fiddles with the VCR and TV, then notices WENONAH's state.)*

**RON.** Oh shit, what did I say?

*(No response.)*

**RON.** The bonanza's not necessarily a windfall of money. He says it could be a pedal boat. Or something you feel but don't know yet. Like that crappy song in West Side Story, "Something's coming...maybe tonight." *(He stands completely still.)* We all need a bonanza, Wenonah.

*(More upset, WENONAH sobs, tightly hugging her appointment book. RON sobs with her, lying down in the fetal position, softly singing.)*

**RON.** "Maybe tonight..."

*(SALOME comes out of her reverie.)*

**SALOME.** Ron, what about that party? *(To WENONAH:)* Hey, how about a tranquilizer? I'll join you...

*(WENONAH shakes her head, sobbing.)*

**SALOME.** *(Panicking:)* Oh, God.

*(WENONAH ignores her and begins meticulously ripping pages from her appointment book. SALOME is horrified, as she watches WENONAH destroy her prized possession.)*

**SALOME.** Why are you doing that? ...Please. Stop... It's just tough for me to get it all together. But I will, Winnie. I promise. Please just stop crying, would you?

*(WENONAH doesn't stop. She rips more pages out of the book. SALOME can't stand it and rushes into a closet offstage. She comes back showing WENONAH her suitcase.)*

**SALOME.** Look, Winnie, I'm getting my suitcase. *(She scrutinizes a dress.)* Damn, it got scorched on the lightbulb.

*(RON and CAROL look on as SALOME opens the suitcase on the bed, presenting clothes to WENONAH as she packs them.)*

**SALOME.** Cheer up. I'm packing. See, in goes the dress... God, the bed. How do people get rid of beds, anyway?

*(WENONAH doesn't respond.)*

**CAROL.** In Nashville they put 'em on the sidewalk, but I never quite figured out where they go. They stay on the curb, with the threadbare couches and three-legged armchairs, and then they just disappear...

**RON.** To the bed cemetery.

*(WENONAH daintily tears more pages out of her book.)*

**SALOME.** Please, Winnie. You're just tired. Hungry. You probably haven't eaten in hours. Can I get you something?

**RON.** If you're heading that way I'd love some cherry Kool-Aid.

**CAROL.** Hot milk with a touch o' nutmeg?

**SALOME.** Sure. Winnie? Cup of "Mellow Mint"? Hot joe? Tall glass of ice water?

*(SALOME goes to WENONAH and puts her hand on her shoulder. WENONAH stops tearing out pages.)*

**SALOME.** Winnie...? Have you left us...?

**WENONAH.** I really...admire you... You have a life...

*(SALOME is skeptical.)*

**WENONAH.** I feel like such a loser.

*(WENONAH breaks down sobbing again and RON joins her. WENONAH goes for more pages.)*

**SALOME.** (*Desperate to stop her:*) *Don't.* Hey, please don't do that. I'm the loser, Winnie. That's what I was thinking about at Mayfair. I've been losing for a long time. I can't even remember when I was winning anymore. There was all this pressure all the time to fit in but I never did. I spent every minute I had trying so hard to fight him. Made a life out of being bad—something I could win at. And every time I had a tiny inkling to be virtuous I went out of my way to stub it out, fast. But I'm not a teenager. The cellulite's regrouping in all the wrong places. My face is sort of settling wrong. Lost my old resilience. I don't remember making any conscious decision to fail. It keeps coming back to haunt me. (*She looks at the bust.*) There's always this little voice saying, "You're not young anymore, you fucked up." People remember you fucked up. You see the pity in their eyes. It's there—it's not paranoia. You feel you can't move, you're so scared. And you *can't* move. You're permanently asleep. You can't do anything, it's in the pit of your gut... Hate... And no one's there to hurt. Even if I wanted to change—I can't. It's eaten away all my good instincts. I can't get out... (*SALOME stares at the bust. She turns to WENONAH.*) Good. You're not crying. That's good. That makes me happy. Thank you. I'm leaving.

(*SALOME exits to the kitchen. WENONAH remains frozen on the bed.*)

**SALOME'S VOICE.** Ron, this isn't the den of iniquity anymore. Winnie's putting in an acrylic sink.

(*SALOME enters with RON's mug and gives it to him.*)

**SALOME.** You're going to have to learn to program your own VCR.

**RON.** Ai yai yai... YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING?

**SALOME.** That's hardly Batman behavior. I love you, Ron. It'll be okay...Uh, Carol?

(*CAROL snuggles under the covers.*)

**SALOME.** This isn't my place anymore. Winnie's putting in a rain-forest.

**CAROL.** (*Sitting up; to WENONAH:*) You can't be serious? *You're evil.*

**SALOME.** If you guys want to try to arrange something with Winnie, feel free. Maybe you could rent space from her. *(To WENONAH:)* Make a little extra cash. Some people need a home-away-from-home. A *pied à terre*.

**RON.** WE HATE WINNIE!

**CAROL.** Yeah.

**WENONAH.** That's not even my name.

**SALOME.** He doesn't mean that.

*(A knock.)*

**WENONAH.** It's probably Pif.

**RON.** Who?

**SALOME.** Her designer.

**WENONAH.** He's also a painter. He paints walls.

**RON.** Of course he does. Naturally.

*(The SENATOR enters.)*

**SENATOR.** Hello.

**CAROL.** You sure don't spend very much time in D.C., do you?

**WENONAH.** Congress isn't in session right now.

**CAROL.** Oh, well, excuse me.

**WENONAH.** Hello, Senator. Nice to see you again...I follow you closely. I'm a big fan of your environmental legislation.

*(RON moans. The SENATOR stares at BATMAN.)*

**SENATOR.** Well, thanks...Salome, I was wondering if I might have a brief word with you?

**SALOME.** Oh sure, if you don't mind a crowd.

**SENATOR.** Well, actually...

**SALOME.** Oh shit, Carol's milk is boiling over.

*(SALOME rushes out. An awkward pause.)*

**WENONAH.** *(To SENATOR:)* We can step out for a sec.

**SENATOR.** I have a car waiting outside.

*(RON moans. SALOME enters with a mug.)*

**SALOME.** Ron, please keep it down.

**RON.** I'm not talking to you, Betty.

**SENATOR.** Betty?

**SALOME.** *(Handing CAROL the mug:)* It's real hot.

**SENATOR.** Your name is really Betty?

**SALOME.** No. It's a long story.

**SENATOR.** I'm heading back tonight and I wanted to talk.

*(RON moans louder. The SENATOR stares.)*

**WENONAH.** How 'bout some more cherry Kool-Aid, Ron?

*(WENONAH, accommodatingly, helps RON out to the offstage kitchen and CAROL follows.)*

**SALOME.** You do realize how strange it is that you keep on coming back here. You must have other people you could talk to. Isn't it dangerous to keep on dropping by? I mean, I hate to get sensational...

**SENATOR.** It's worth the risk.

**SALOME.** Why exactly did you stop by?

**SENATOR.** Maybe we could get a drink?

**SALOME.** I'm leaving myself, actually.

**SENATOR.** Leaving yourself?

**SALOME.** I'm also leaving.

**SENATOR.** Where to?

**SALOME.** Around. I don't have an itinerary yet.

**SENATOR.** Well, just thought you might want to...shoot the breeze for a while...

**SALOME.** I would if I could. It's funny you'd take a liking to someone like me. I hate the government.

**SENATOR.** So do lots of people. But the real reason they hate it is they don't quite comprehend it. If you look at it like one big expense account, it's a lot easier to understand...

**SALOME.** Speech you wrote? Probably not... Well, who knows, maybe I'll visit.

*(CAROL sneaks into the room to get her clothes and exits.)*

**SENATOR.** ...Well. I want to wish you luck.

**SALOME.** Good luck to you.

*(A pause.)*

**SENATOR.** Truth is I don't know why I'm here. I don't have an idea in hell why I came.

*(A pause.)*

**SALOME.** I just hate this part of it, though. I mean, okay, I'm really trying to clean up my act. But still, that whole part about thinking. Talking. Figuring it all out. I just hate that. *Thinking.*

*(The SENATOR takes her in his arms and kisses her. They break apart.)*

**SALOME.** I really don't get it. It makes no sense. I'll listen to them, give it a whirl, you know. Baby quilts. Lean cuisine. Sure, if that's what everybody wants...

**SENATOR.** Who's everybody?

**SALOME.** People...

**SENATOR.** People?

**SALOME.** Everybody. The Gallup poll.

**SENATOR.** What do *you* say?

**SALOME.** I don't know if I can hear it...

**SENATOR.** Try.

*(A pause.)*

**SALOME.** *(In tears:)* It's a small voice...

*(SALOME shrugs her shoulders, apologetically.)*

I wish I was more your type.

**SENATOR.** You're a beautiful woman, Salome.

**SALOME.** Oh fuck, I used to be.

**SENATOR.** You are.

**SALOME.** Thanks.

**SENATOR.** *(Joking:)* Hate to break it to you, but I'm not the Kennedy cousin.

**SALOME.** People can't stop looking for him, though. You'd think they'd have a little more faith in the present.

**SENATOR.** He was a very charismatic man.

**SALOME.** So are you.

**SENATOR.** *(Laughing:)* Oh fuck, I used to be.

**SALOME.** You are.

**SENATOR.** Thanks. Well, my car's waiting.

*(WENONAH peeks in, as they kiss, then hurries away.)*

**SALOME.** Yeah.

**SENATOR.** That's what got me.

**SALOME.** What?

**SENATOR.** That you didn't know who I was.

**SALOME.** I knew your face. I'm bad with names.

**SENATOR.** The anonymity. That really made my day.

**SALOME.** That's not a good sign for a politician.

**SENATOR.** *(Points to the suitcase:)* That's a good sign.

**SALOME.** I've been in bed for five years.

**SENATOR.** So have I. In the Senate...I should go.

## **THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!**

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