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Cast of Characters

JAYNE

RON

JOHN

MARY

MATHEW

MIMOSA

by Alex Austin

ACT I

Scene 1

(A contemporary study, light, open and airy. A computer console occupies the left side of the room. On the right side is a small couch and coffee table, on which rest several potted plants in watering dishes, an incense holder and books, and a phone. At the back of the study is a well-stocked bookcase, which also holds small statues of Buddha and Krishna, several framed diplomas and a family photograph. To the right of the bookcase is its twin, but this holds only plants of many varieties and sizes. There is also an ornate metal box, which serves as the stand for a potted orchid. On the left of the bookcases are a wet bar and several stools. On the right of the bookcase is a window with the blinds drawn, revealing a mimosa tree and letting in the midday sun. JAYNE SHEEHAN and JOHN BLUM are sitting on the couch. JAYNE, 39, is pretty and lithe, her hair cropped fashionably short. She wears a skirt and buttoned sweater. JOHN, 35, is of average build with boyish good looks. JOHN undoes a button on JAYNE's sweater, then another. He stops and looks around nervously.)

JOHN. *(Breathlessly:)* Someone could...walk by the window.

JAYNE. A meteorite could crash through the roof. The dead could rise from their graves.

(She puts her fingers on his lips and draws open his mouth.)

A girl could go insane.

(She kisses him passionately.)

JOHN. There's something... I want to do something...for you.

(JOHN kneels before her.)

JAYNE. I'm delirious with anticipation

JOHN. *(Stilted. An effort:)* I'm going to lift—that tree.

JAYNE. What?

(He looks at the window.)

JOHN. I like thought I saw something move in the lemon tree.

(JAYNE looks at the window.)

JAYNE. *Mimosa* tree.

JOHN. Yeah...

JAYNE. Did you see a young girl and boy among the branches?

JOHN. No. Just—

JAYNE. A pretty young girl of fourteen and a slender handsome boy not much older?

JOHN. No, nothing like—

JAYNE. I made love to my first boy in a mimosa tree, balanced on a bifurcated branch, an act of extreme courage, balance and agility. A defining moment. Perhaps you had a shamanistic vision of that encounter, but more likely it was the boys' Tarzan rope swinging in the breeze.

JOHN. Tarzan rope? Hmm. I guess. Could be.

(JAYNE puts her hand on JOHN's cheek and turns him away from the window.)

JAYNE. *Delirious with anticipation*, she waited while he...

JOHN. *Oh.* Yeah. I'm going to...

(JOHN leans into her and whispers something. JAYNE pulls her head away and laughs.)

JAYNE. *Chime?*

JOHN. Yeah. You know. Chime.

(She pulls his hand to her mouth. She touches his thumb ring.)

JAYNE. We don't want to crack the bell, do we?

(JOHN takes off his thumb ring and tosses it on the table. The ring rolls to the floor. JOHN proceeds. JAYNE moans. There's a knock. JOHN freezes.)

Yes?

MATHEW. *(Offstage:)* Me, mom.

(JOHN stands up as JAYNE rearranges her skirt and buttons her blouse.)

JAYNE. *Mathew.* What are you doing home from school?

MATHEW. I'm sick. Can I come in?

(Getting to her feet, JAYNE smiles, kisses JOHN and walks over to the door. She lets MATHEW in. She takes him in her arms. MATHEW is a skinny, awkward bespectacled young man of 17. He wears baggy chinos that are slipping down his ass. His hair is punked out. He wears a backpack filled with books.)

JAYNE. What's the matter, honey?

MATHEW. Just feel like crap.

(She kisses his forehead.)

JAYNE. You feel a little warm. Did they take your temperature at school?

MATHEW. It was 110. I felt like I was going to vomit.

JAYNE. At 110 you'd vaporize.

(MATHEW glances at JOHN.)

Mathew, this is John. John this is Mathew.

(JOHN takes a stride toward MATHEW and extends his hand. At the last second, he draws it back.)

JOHN. How you doing, buddy?

MATHEW. I'm *sick*. Maybe you heard. My mom tutor you?

JAYNE. John is in a class I take. We're friends.

MATHEW. You look familiar. I think I saw you someplace.

JOHN. Um, well, it's possible. I don't think so.

MATHEW. At the arcade in the mall. You play Space Annihilator.

JOHN. Must be somebody else. People are always mistaking me for somebody else.

MATHEW. It's a weak game anyway.

JOHN. Yeah. Well, I wouldn't know...

(MATHEW takes off his backpack and sets it on the floor.)

JAYNE. Maybe you should lie down.

JOHN. Sleep really helps me when I'm sick. I can sleep for 24 hours when I'm sick, actually.

MATHEW. My mother says that sleep is a waste of time.

JAYNE. But not when you're ill, Mathew.

MATHEW. *We mediate. We want to be aware.*

JOHN. Huh...

JAYNE. Do you want me to fix you a Roy Rogers toddy?

MATHEW. No, that's okay. I borrowed that CD I was telling you about. You want to hear it?

JAYNE. Only if we can play it LOUD.

(MATHEW starts for the CD player.)

But not now, Mathew.

MATHEW. It'll take just—

JAYNE. *Later?*

MATHEW. Later, mom.

JAYNE. Later, *dude.*

(MATHEW picks up his backpack and exits.)

JOHN. Nice kid. Really.

(JAYNE walks over and locks the door.)

JAYNE. I thought we handled that well. *Do you play Space Annihilator at the Mall?*

JOHN. Come on, huh? That stuff's for kids.

JAYNE. You have the hands of an arcade player.

(She takes his hand and brings it to her lips.)

(Blackout.)

Scene 2

(Jayne's study, that evening. RON, Jayne's husband, is sitting on one of the barstools unfolding a towel. RON is a well-built, handsome man in his mid-forties. He wears jeans, loafers, and a T-shirt. On the bar are two Martinis. RON pulls the towel up over his chest, drapes it across his shoulders, and then tucks the edge into the neck of his T-shirt. JAYNE enters holding scissors, a comb and a mirror.)

RON. Where are—Ego and Eco?

JAYNE. The twins are at Arthur's house skateboarding. Mathew's in his room. He's not feeling well.

RON. Umm. I was hoping to take them down to the park.

(JAYNE hands one of the drinks to RON and takes a sip from her drink. Holding the scissors and comb, she circles her husband. She positions herself behind him, runs the comb through his hair several times, then begins to cut. She will continue to cut as they speak.)

Do I really need—

JAYNE. Yes, Ron. You're much better shorn.

RON. I just want to throw a few passes to them. Maybe I should—

JAYNE. Don't move.

(RON draws his arm back as if to throw a football, then tucks his arm in and sits still.)

I used to play football with them all the time. I've still got bruises from where they tackled me. They'd each grab a leg and get me down. Then they'd jump on my butt. *Don't move.* Well, they were younger.

RON. You had the best of them. They just don't seem to need me that much.

JAYNE. They haven't needed me since they quit soccer. They're independent. They've got each other.

RON. Yeah, I guess that's true.

JAYNE. You look a little tired. Are you tired?

RON. I can't tell anymore. What's that a sign of?

JAYNE. That you're tired.

RON. Age, most likely. What's the matter with Mathew?

JAYNE. Nothing specific. He's running a slight temperature.

(RON stares grimly at this drink.)

So what's the matter with *you*?

RON. Same old same old. Some advertisers have threatened to bolt unless the paper reins in its token liberal.

JAYNE. What advertisers?

RON. All of them apparently. The new city editor is asking for my columns in advance. And it ain't because he likes them. That lackey is just working up the guts to kill one.

JAYNE. They can do that?

RON. Oh, first they'll ask me to retract it. And if I refuse—

(RON draws his finger across his neck.)

JAYNE. And the bastards know you'll refuse.

RON. Yeah...

JAYNE. It's obscene. A Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist. *Sit still.*

RON. Pulitzer-nominated journalist. I lost with about 2,000 others

JAYNE. You should have won. Your story was brilliant. *I award you the Pulitzer. You just don't get the money.*

(JAYNE puts her scissors down.)

(Reciting from memory:) While Muslim extremists in Indonesia have forced hundreds of women to undergo genital excision with rusty razor blades, this administration and its Supreme Court cohort have chosen the coat hanger. Does anyone think that the zealous effort to deny women their right to legal abortions is any less an effort to turn back the clock on the sexual revolution? Let the terror of back alley abortions be the invisible hand that controls a woman's sexual freedom. This administration won't stop until it has denied—umm...

RON. That's plenty. Tortuous, huh? Maybe I am out of control.

JAYNE. I don't waste my memory on things I don't love.

(JAYNE picks up the scissors and resumes cutting.)

Monotheism. Ugh.

RON. I keep using the same words, phrases

JAYNE. Hmm...

RON. Fat-cat corporate sponsors. Sweeping invasion of personal privacy. Lavishly funded. I ran a program on my last fifty columns and I'm using the same words over and over. I've exhausted the liberal canon. I'm...*spent*.

JAYNE. My parents should hear that. God, you were passionate. You pounded their table. Shook them in their boots.

RON. I had calluses on the heel of my hand.

JAYNE. You shook the room.

RON. Yeah... So when does the quarter end?

JAYNE. Two weeks. I've signed up for three classes in the spring. I hope I'll be able to handle it.

RON. You'll handle it. You always do.

JAYNE. I'm not getting pathetic, am I? I sometimes think we career students are like those prisoners that have been in jail so long that they dread the freedom that will let them leave the prison and the confines of their cell. If they weren't offering that course on Schelling...

RON. Clams or oysters?

JAYNE. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, fool. That guy got it.

RON. It?

JAYNE. The battle between mind and nature that permeates modernity.

RON. That's our Ego. That's our Eco.

JAYNE. You hate their nicknames, don't you?

RON. Better than Surf and Turf.

JAYNE. Unnatural, but appropriate. They've been fighting like hyenas since the day they came out of my womb.

RON. Something smells good.

JAYNE. Pecan cookies. For the PTA.

RON. You hate the PTA.

JAYNE. I just don't fit in.

RON. You're the rebel. How do you know they're not thinking like you inside?

JAYNE. I don't. I don't know the apparent conformists from the real conformists. There are also apparent rebels, but I choose not to sit among them because it might take away from my rebel light. How egotistical and sad, huh? I talk a good game, but where is my Buddha nature?

(JAYNE snips a few more hairs, then puts down the scissors and comb. She holds the mirror up for RON.)

RON. Perfect.

(JAYNE removes the towel. RON stands up, brushes the hairs away from his neck and takes the mirror. As he checks himself out, JAYNE exits the room. RON smiles into the mirror, then sets it down. JAYNE returns pulling a vacuum cleaner. As JAYNE unwraps the vacuum's cord, RON walks over to the computer and reads from the text on the screen.)

...despondent over leading his army into a battle against his own relatives and friends, Arjuna asked Krishna how he could reconcile his duty with the knowledge that he would be destroying his kin and friends. Krishna answered that “there is no existence for that which does not exist, nor is there any non-existence for what exists.

(RON looks down.)

JAYNE. The central argument of the Upanishads.

(JAYNE turns on the vacuum and runs it over the area where RON got his haircut.)

RON. *(Pointing:)* There.

(JAYNE runs the vacuum over the spot. RON scans the floor.)

There's another clump.

(As JAYNE aims the vacuum toward the clump of hair, RON steps in front of her path. He bends and picks up something from the floor. He holds up JOHN's thumb ring. JAYNE turns off the vacuum.)

Jesus, I haven't seen one of these since shop class. A ring made out of a lug nut. Did Mathew make this? I didn't know they offered shop classes anymore.

JAYNE. It's John's thumb ring. John's a student in the Mahahharata course.

RON. Is he on a weight loss program?

(JAYNE laughs and grabs the ring from RON. She tucks the ring in her pocket. She embraces RON and kisses him. They sit on the couch. RON grabs her ass.)

An ass like marble and she can bake pecan cookies.

JAYNE. Even with a compliment as lovely as that, you're still not getting any.

RON. Getting any? Oh, cookies, of course. Do those people you tutor ever pay? I mean lug-nut John, for instance?

JAYNE. I don't tutor John.

RON. No?

JAYNE. No. Well, maybe one pecan cookie. Come on.

(JAYNE rises, holding out her hand to RON.)

RON. So, John is?

JAYNE. *Is* the unnamed player in our agreement.

RON. *Agreement.* Go ahead.

JAYNE. Our agreement about extramarital affairs.

RON. Oh, *that* agreement.

(Pause. Thinking.)

I know that you're just playing with me. But, I'm still getting a little nervous here.

(RON gets up.)

JAYNE. I'm really disappointed. I thought this would flow naturally. I've taken on a lover. *Thump. Thump.*

RON. Get outa here, Jayne.

JAYNE. I know this must be somewhat unsettling. John is my lover.

RON. What the hell are you talking about? I pick up a ring from the floor—

(JAYNE puts her arms around him. He lets her hold him for a few seconds then steps back.)

JAYNE. Even if you hadn't brought it up, I would have.

RON. I didn't bring it up. I found *a ring* on the floor. I brought *it* up.

(Pause.)

Lover, right. *What* did you do?

JAYNE. We had sex.

RON. When?

JAYNE. This afternoon.

(RON finishes his drink.)

RON. Where?

JAYNE. Here.

RON. Here? In our house?

JAYNE. In *my* room. You're acting as if this were a surprise.

RON. Surprise? A surprise is when you walk into a dark room and the lights go on and twenty of your friends yell HAPPY BIRTHDAY! This is a sudden blow to the head. This is trauma.

JAYNE. I didn't think you would react like this.

RON. Umm. Here? On...the couch?

JAYNE. Yes.

(She tries to put her arms around RON, but he slips away. RON inspects the couch.)

RON. I hope you put a sheet down.

JAYNE. All our furniture is Scotch-guarded.

RON. Ah, that's the reason. Aren't the brownies burning?

JAYNE. They're on a timer.

RON. *(Pause.)* Who is he? Have I ever met him?

JAYNE. No, you don't know him.

RON. How old is he?

JAYNE. I don't see how that is relevant.

RON. How old is he?

JAYNE. Who—

RON. How *old* is he?

JAYNE. He's not that much younger than you are. Thirty-five or thirty-six.

RON. Are you guessing or evading?

JAYNE. I haven't asked for his driver's license.

RON. Good looking guy? A stud?

JAYNE. He's an average guy.

RON. Average. How many other men have you had sex with? How far down the line was lug-nut John?

JAYNE. First.

RON. Last. You're not seeing him again. We walk out of here and this never happened. We bury it. We bury him. The slate's clean.

JAYNE. Your generosity is noted.

RON. Yours as well.

JAYNE. I'm *sincere*, Ron.

RON. Sincere as pecan cookies.

(She turns away. She bites her lip. Her eyes well up.)

Don't tell me you're crying.

JAYNE. I am SINCERE! I know that—that...

RON. *Why the hell should she be crying?*

JAYNE. Everything was fine in the abstract, but now because it's a real penis, real flesh, real blood—

RON. Enough! I get the physiology.

(JAYNE turns and slips her hand around RON's neck.)

I've never been with another woman during our entire marriage. I've never danced with a strange woman. *An outrageous lie that she will never believe.*

(He removes her hand.)

JAYNE. Oh, like I believe that.

RON. I never made any agreement. Do you love him?

JAYNE. This is not about love. Love springs from the shadows like a tiger.

RON. Then what?...

JAYNE. Desire and curiosity. Beyond that it's just as much of a mystery to me as it is to you. But I have faith in the honesty of my mysteries.

RON. And you love me?

JAYNE. If I didn't love you, do you think I would be with you? Do you want another drink?

RON. No. I've had my fill.

(RON sets down his glass and walks toward the door.)

JAYNE. I'm devoted to you and the children. 95 percent of my life is involved with you and the children. Does this fraction, this 5 percent mean that much? Can't you accept me having that much?

(RON exits.)

(Blackout.)

Scene 3

(The light comes up on JAYNE and RON standing side by side, facing the audience. Their hands are at their sides.)

JAYNE. Would you kiss me?

RON. No, Jayne. I won't kiss you.

JAYNE. I forgot to mention it, but I was cleaning the bathroom and knocked your new bottle of aftershave on the floor. It broke. I tried to save some of the balm in the portion of the bottle that remained intact, but there were shards of glass in there also. So I had to throw it all out. I know it was your favorite. I'll buy you another bottle. I meant to buy you one today.

RON. I'll get it myself. There wasn't much left anyway.

JAYNE. No it was half full. The balm went everywhere.

RON. It was almost empty. I know. I use it.

JAYNE. There were shards of glass everywhere. I think I got them all, but in the morning you should be careful. Wear those awful slippers my mother bought you.

RON. Sure.

JAYNE. If I sounded as if I didn't dread that moment—

RON. Like a drowning man dreads his footing.

JAYNE. He dies a little death to find it. I too, Ron.

RON. *Well moored, she catches her breath.*

JAYNE. It was difficult to be so direct, but I'm sure it's for the best.

RON. Which is yet to come.

JAYNE. Lately you've been making those funny sounds again when you sleep, or perhaps it's the lack of sounds. Some nights when you're sleeping, I put my hand on your chest just to make sure you're still breathing. I fall asleep like that.

RON. My heart beats fine. My memory, too.

JAYNE. What were you thinking then?

RON. When?

JAYNE. On the night of the mystery.

RON. You've lost me again.

JAYNE. We were in bed watching a movie. It was one of those intense British mysteries. A deranged nurse was drugging people and mutilating them. I said that the actor who played the detective fascinated me. I couldn't take my eyes off him. You put your hand on me. I got turned on and I was caught between watching the mystery and having sex. I wanted to do both. When I told you that, you said that I could pretend you were he.

RON. I don't remember that.

JAYNE. And when you suggested that, I said that I would never do that because I liked making love to you more than I could with anyone else. But it occurred to me that it was the first time we talked about such a thing.

RON. It never happened.

JAYNE. We were drinking in bed.

RON. We don't drink in bed. Maybe ten years ago.

JAYNE. Yes. We were drinking in the living room, and we brought the drinks up so that we could drink in bed and watch the mystery.

RON. The mystery. The mystery again. It plays a large part.

JAYNE. And you said that if I wanted to pretend that I was having sex with the actor while I was having sex with you, it would be all right.

RON. This never happened. I was asleep. You must have tapped me and asked me something that was unintelligible and I grunted or something. You may as well have said, "If you don't answer me, I'll take that as a yes." That's where this is coming from. You had a conversation with yourself.

JAYNE. I'm not crazy.

RON. Nothing like that happened. And what the hell does it have to do with anything. An actor in a British mystery?

JAYNE. Mutilated bodies. So graphic...

RON. Nothing.

JAYNE. And you said that it didn't have to be just a fantasy. If I wanted to have sex with another man to explore my spiritual depths or to satisfy my curiosity that it would be all right. You held me in your arms and said that.

RON. A dream. A wish-fulfilling dream.

JAYNE. What's your fantasy, Ron?

RON. *Please, Jayne.*

JAYNE. No. I asked you. That night.

RON. For Christ's sake—

JAYNE. Young girls...

RON. YOUNG GIRLS? I never—

JAYNE. *Virgins.* Well, go find one.

RON. Ah. So that's how I agreed?

JAYNE. You liked men to look at me. You liked men to come on to me. You liked it when they backed me to the wall and touched my arm for emphasis.

RON. It reminded me of how lucky I was. To have—

JAYNE. My love? My body?

RON. I thought they were one in the same. But now I see they're coiled snakes. Jesus, I'm hot.

JAYNE. Maybe you're coming down with whatever Mathew—

RON. I'm not sick. Don't start that.

JAYNE. When you're sick, you say your memory—

RON. Jayne, shut up. I need sleep. I just need to sleep.

JAYNE. It happened, Ron.

RON. Goodnight, Jayne.

JAYNE. May I kiss you?

RON. Do whatever you want to do. You're going to do it anyway.

(JAYNE kisses him, but he doesn't respond. As RON reveals his thoughts in the following monologue, JAYNE caresses his body with her hands and mouth, working her way down his torso.)

RON. *Must not. So absurd. Ignore absurdities. Adultery. If in the church. If in the church. Other. Wet. Sliding. Lose her. Lose her. No. Smell of her hair. Pearls of her backbone. Thigh. Heat. Bonds. Trust. Desire is constant. We slide past desirable bodies constantly. Erection. Don't want an erection. Control. Don't move. No. Move. Turn away. Can't give an inch. Gorillas have two-inch penises. Must sleep. Jayne undressing. His hand on her breast. His lips sinking against hers. Jayne's body. His body. I'm getting a gut. YOUNG GIRLS!*

(She rests her head sideways at his groin, and places her hand over his heart.)

JAYNE. I would never lie to you, because I won't lie to myself.

(Blackout.)

Scene 4

(Jayne's study, the following morning. The blind on the window is open, but the room is dim. It's raining. JAYNE enters wearing a poncho and carrying an open umbrella, which she carefully closes. As she removes the poncho, MATHEW enters dressed in pajamas. He is holding a CD. He watches her as she removes the poncho and carefully brushes at her hair in the window. She turns and starts.)

JAYNE. Oh!

MATHEW. Morning, Mom.

JAYNE. I didn't—what an old woman I'm becoming.

MATHEW. The door was open.

JAYNE. You're stealthy, Mathew. You're like a hunter.

MATHEW. You're making fun of me.

JAYNE. It's a good faculty for hunting, it isn't something that you want to practice with people. It's a bad habit to sneak up or overhear people. It can produce the most unfortunate results.

MATHEW. I didn't sneak up. I walked in. Are you mad at me or something?

JAYNE. No. It's just the rain. I drove Ego and Eco to school. They argued all the way. Eco said we needed the rain. Ego said we didn't. I almost rear-ended a truck.

MATHEW. Their names are Sean and Liam, mom. They hate that Eco Ego stuff.

(JAYNE walks to the window and stares.)

What are you looking at?

JAYNE. Our tree... Could I still climb it, I wonder?...

MATHEW. You shouldn't.

(Turning from the window, JAYNE walks over to him and puts her hand to his forehead. She takes off his glasses, wipes them clean with her shirt. She wets her finger with her tongue then draws her finger across each eyebrow. She sets his glasses back on.)

JAYNE. How are you feeling? You should still be in bed, my little Matty.

MATHEW. I woke up at four and couldn't get back to sleep... I went on the Internet. Yahoo had pictures of Mars taken by a satellite. Mars looked like the Grand Canyon. They think there was water once on Mars to make those formations. Do you think there might have been life on Mars?

JAYNE. I think there's a good possibility of life throughout the universe. They say there are many planets, perhaps millions. Some must be like ours.

MATHEW. Oh, yeah. But Mars, it's so close. You can see it at night. It's that close.

JAYNE. You'll have to point it out to me.

MATHEW. But suppose there was life, millions of years before ours. All those people and animals dead and gone.

JAYNE. Or some other place. They may all be in another dimension looking down at earth's scars and wondering what happened to us.

MATHEW. Whose theory is that?

JAYNE. I'd like to take credit, but it's string theory, which involves the possibility of thousands of dimensions and has little regard for our commonsense notions of time. I've got an article somewhere...

MATHEW. I'll play you that CD.

JAYNE. You are still sick and should be in bed, and I've got a paper to write. Later, huh?

(She touches his forehead.)

Although I don't feel any temperature...

MATHEW. You and dad were arguing, huh?

JAYNE. You see. Stealthy people become eavesdroppers. And eavesdroppers sometimes fall off roofs.

MATHEW. Come on. You were nearly yelling.

JAYNE. Hardly. But I apologize if we kept you awake.

MATHEW. Are you going to tell me? I mean, why you were arguing?

JAYNE. Your school doesn't have a nurse. Who took your temperature?

MATHEW. The janitor.

JAYNE. I was the queen of hooky. Caught.

MATHEW. I felt sick. Really. Come on, don't look at me that way...

JAYNE. School sucks?

MATHEW. Yeah. Bigtime. They just pile this garbage on you. Kopwalski. She's the worst.

JAYNE. We've had this discussion.

MATHEW. *You* dropped out.

JAYNE. True. But I had a legitimate reason. I wanted to shame my parents.

(JAYNE puts her arms around MATHEW.)

MATHEW. I hate you.

JAYNE. Too late, little Matty.

MATHEW. No. I really hate you, mom

(She kisses him.)

JAYNE. It won't work.

MATHEW. Why did you want to shame your parents?

JAYNE. Because they lived in terror of embarrassment—the fear that as they passed a corner someone might whisper their names. Ssssss! They bore a mutant that would cause their fear to pass.

MATHEW. Mutants have gigantic heads and huge eyes.

JAYNE. I have a big head inside my head and huge eyes inside my eyes.

MATHEW. So what were you arguing about?

JAYNE. Un uh...

MATHEW. Come on, mom, you always do.

JAYNE. No.

MATHEW. If you don't tell me, I'll tickle you.

(MATHEW moves toward her. JAYNE backs away.)

JAYNE. No! Don't you dare!

MATHEW. TICKLE or TELL!

(MATHEW grabs his mother and attempts to get his hand under her armpit. They struggle for a moment.)

JAYNE. Stop, stop! I'll tell!

(Pause.)

No. I won't!

(MATHEW goes for her armpit again.)

All right! All right

(Pause.)

I can't!

MATHEW. That's not fair. I tell you everything. You're not *your* mom, are you?

(JAYNE turns away, covering her mouth. She drops her hand and faces her son.)

JAYNE. I have a romantic interest.

MATHEW. You have a *boyfriend*?

JAYNE. I'd prefer to characterize it as a romantic interest. Boyfriends wash your car and take you out to football games.

MATHEW. Who is he?

JAYNE. You met him the other day. John. Remember? ...Are you all right?

MATHEW. Yeah.

JAYNE. You're shocked, aren't you?

MATHEW. I don't know. It's just weird. Are you and dad divorcing?

JAYNE. Oh, Matty, I love your father.

MATHEW. Do you love this guy John, too?

JAYNE. That love is not divisible. Let's just say I like to play with John. Oh, God, that sounds so smutty—worse, cowardly. I grow squeamish.

MATHEW. Sex?

JAYNE. Sex. Is that so bad?

(MATHEW walks over to the window.)

The thing is, Matty, this doesn't in any way affect *our* relationship. You've studied set theory? Each person is a set of ten-thousand things. And where our sets overlap are the things that we do have in common. Your first skiing lesson. Chickenpox. My reading Grimm's to you in candlelight. But there are areas that don't overlap. There will be so many areas in your life that I will know nothing about or have only the faintest idea. What chaos and confusion there would be if we totally overlapped. And so we must accept that the other, mother, father, check-out person at the supermarket that knows your name is really someone that you'll never know entirely. It's our ego that makes us think we encompass them.

(MATHEW walks over to the orchid. He picks up the razor blade from the dish.)

MATHEW. Ego and Eco have girlfriends.

JAYNE. They're the kind of boys that girls like, generally.

MATHEW. They're only thirteen.

JAYNE. Fourteen this summer. Yes, despite their mother's silly nicknames, they've already got their cool.

(MATHEW sets down the blade and picks up the CD.)

MATHEW. When you see him, Mom, do you turn to Jell-O? Do I sound like a girl? I thought I sounded like a girl when I asked that

question. You know how girls ask questions that they don't care about the answers.

JAYNE. Like girls repeat words.

MATHEW. Never. Never. Never.

JAYNE. And when they talk about boys it's always like they're talking about food. Delicious. Yummy. I could eat him up.

MATHEW. *Do you turn to—*

(Shimmying.)

Jell-O? Jell-O? Jell-O?

JAYNE. For God's sake, Mathew.

MATHEW. This is really a great record.

JAYNE. Play it then.

(MATHEW puts in the CD. JAYNE starts to move her hips to the beat. She takes MATHEW's hand. They dance. She rocks her hips against his and they laugh.)

(Blackout.)

Scene 5

(Jayne's study. Several days later. There are two half-full Martini glasses on the table. Standing, JAYNE and JOHN kiss passionately.)

JOHN. There's something I want to do for you...

(JOHN whispers in her ear. JAYNE laughs. JOHN tries to bring his hand against her, but she restrains him.)

JAYNE. I'm a great admirer of Cirque de Soleil, but unfortunately it's that time of the month.

JOHN. Oh, you mean...

JAYNE. It's the price we pay for abandoning periodicity.

JOHN. But I—

JAYNE. Most animals only go into heat at certain times of the year, narrowing the opportunities for copulation; primates, among which I proudly count myself, are not so restricted, but women pay the—*piper* with their menses.

JOHN. Oh, *that...*

(JAYNE breaks away. She retrieves the Martinis and hands one to JOHN.)

JAYNE. Where does your wife think you are now?

JOHN. She doesn't ask.

JAYNE. THINK.

JOHN. Oh, *think*. I don't know. She probably *thinks* I'm at the library. That wouldn't be far from the truth, would it? But probably, you know, she doesn't think about it.

JAYNE. If she asked, would you tell her the truth?

JOHN. She's not going to ask.

JAYNE. *If.*

JOHN. She wouldn't understand. She just wouldn't. She's not like you, Jayne.

JAYNE. Oh?

JOHN. You take what you want.

JAYNE. Reductio ad absurdum. You annoy me. Get out.

(JAYNE snatches his Martini glass.)

JOHN. Hey, what did I say? I don't even know what you said.

JAYNE. Take? I don't take anything. ANYTHING!

(Holding the Martini glasses, JAYNE pushes him.)

JOHN. I'm sorry. Come on, huh?

JAYNE. Out! Get out!

(JOHN pulls her to him. She waves the Martini glasses, whose contents have now spilled. Her arms fall and she allows him to comfort her.)

JAYNE. I *give*. I *give*. Don't you ever...

JOHN. I'm stupid.

JAYNE. Stupid and gin-soaked.

JOHN. We wasted some good booze.

JAYNE. ...oodles of Boodles. I'm sorry. I overreacted. It's that...

JOHN. Yeah.

JAYNE. I just don't want to be...*misunderstood*. By anyone...

(JAYNE breaks away.)

I owe you a fresh drink.

(At the wet bar, JAYNE mixes the drinks.)

Oh, here.

(JAYNE fishes out JOHN's ring from the wet bar. He takes it, inspects it for a second then slips it on.)

Ron found it.

JOHN. Really?

JAYNE. You're no longer abstract.

JOHN. He knows? I mean he knows what we did? I mean, he knows my name and stuff?

JAYNE. Oh, stuff. How very important is stuff. Without stuff we would float away like balloons.

JOHN. But he's okay with it, huh? Right?

JAYNE. Twixt theory and practice lies a rough road.

JOHN. Oh?

JAYNE. He's giving me the silent treatment. Waiting me out. I wonder where that tactic came from? My guess is that it has some-

thing to do with hunting. Immobile and silent the hunter as he strokes his spear and awaits his prey.

JOHN. Spear?

JAYNE. I'm sure it's for the best that it's out.

(Sotto Voce:) Yet, he denies it. As if I dreamt it. So that either he lies or...

(Pause.)

Besides, am I not worth a little risk?

(JOHN moves to JAYNE. They kiss.)

JOHN. When I have sex with my wife, I'm thinking of you.

JAYNE. I don't want you to think about me when you're with her. That seems tawdry and unfair.

JOHN. Um. Actually, not all the time. I didn't mean that.

JAYNE. I think you should tell her.

JOHN. I can't.

JAYNE. Coward.

JOHN. Oh, yeah, right? Like I had an agreement with Mary. Don't be, don't be—pushing me, Jayne. I'm doing my best okay? Like this ain't all I've got on my mind, you know?

JAYNE. What's going on?

JOHN. Nothing.

JAYNE. Please, tell me.

JOHN. It's not your problem.

JAYNE. I'm not assuming that it is, but even when I'm overwhelmed with my own problems, I'm still capable of offering un-requested, annoying advice.

JOHN. I got scammed.

JAYNE. What does that mean?

JOHN. I was driving down Magnolia and these Russian dudes pulled right out in front of me. I hit the brakes but I still nailed them on the passenger side. Wasn't much more than a tap. But the passenger starts screaming like he's really hurt or something. So I get out of the car to see what's going on and the driver starts screaming at me. Then this woman comes out of nowhere and says she saw the whole thing. She says I ran the light. She's full of shit. 'cause she's in with them, too, you know? But the driver's saying he's gonna sue the shit out of me, and he's playing this little game with her, telling her how grateful he is that she stepped forward. Man, I mean, they had this scam down.

JAYNE. Can't you just call your insurance company?

JOHN. Yeah, well, I don't have insurance.

JAYNE. Everyone has insurance.

JOHN. I don't *have* insurance. I can't afford insurance for two cars. Mary's got insurance.

JAYNE. Did you tell the Russians that?

JOHN. They were gonna call the cops. Do you know what happens if the cops show up and I've been in an accident and I don't have insurance, and—and I've got liquor on my breath?

JAYNE. You were *drinking*?

JOHN. Where do you think I was coming from? Here! I was coming from here! I gave them a check so there'd be no accident. *Two-thousand dollars.*

JAYNE. Oh, John, I'm so sorry. It must be gnawing on you to know for a fraction of that you could have had insurance.

JOHN. Jayne, I don't have two hundred dollars, much less two thousand. They let me post-date the check. I've got three days to get the money in the bank.

JAYNE. Oh...

JOHN. In another month I'd be good for it.

JAYNE. How much money do you need?

JOHN. I can maybe scrape up five hundred.

(JAYNE walks over to the bookshelf, takes the orchid off the ornate metal box.)

JAYNE. Were you here for the earthquake, John?

JOHN. Yeah.

JAYNE. Ron was out of the country on assignment. The ATMs weren't working and I had twenty-seven cents.

(She opens the box. She extracts a number of hundred dollar bills and counts out fifteen. She turns to JOHN and holds out the bills.)

But I'll never again be without sufficient cash. I'll loan you the fifteen hundred. A month you said, right?

JOHN. I can't take this.

JAYNE. What good are you to me if you're in the pokey?

(JOHN shrugs and sticks the money in his pants pocket. They kiss. There's a knock. JAYNE sighs and slips from JOHN's embrace.)

My son is going through a difficult time. Come in, Matty.

(The door opens. RON walks in. He looks at JOHN, sinks back a little, then rushes at JOHN, his raised hands closing into fists. JAYNE steps in his path.)

It's not him!

(Halting against JAYNE, RON drops his hands. Shaking her head, JAYNE takes RON by the hand and leads him out of the room.)

(Blackout.)

Scene 6

(A solitary light comes up on JAYNE and RON standing a foot apart, facing the audience.)

JAYNE. Where did you go?

RON. For a drive. I drove through the canyon... A fox bounded across the road, no more than 30 feet in front of the car. I was doing

fifty. If he had paused for an instant, I would have killed him. Big bushy tail. Not a coyote. Most animals freeze in the headlights...or at least, they pause to look. A dog would have slowed. A deer, maybe.

JAYNE. I was worried.

RON. So?

JAYNE. I was worried, that's all.

(They are silent. RON turns on his side, away from her.)

Target now sells a device that attaches to the bedclothes that will prevent your sleeping partner from pulling away your share of the blanket. Apparently, it's a problem that America faces on par with snoring.

RON. You lied to me.

JAYNE. Hate the snoring, love the snorer.

RON. A bold lie too. You don't lie, you say.

JAYNE. I didn't want to create a scene. It was the best I could do, or at least that I could think of under difficult circumstances, which I was suddenly thrust into.

RON. I came *home*.

JAYNE. A habit is a promise. You wanted to catch us in the act.

RON. Yes.

JAYNE. I was having my period.

RON. *Ah...*

JAYNE. Which means?

RON. You don't have periods...anymore.

JAYNE. Something happens. You know that.

RON. I always thought that was—

JAYNE. So. Ah.

RON. I didn't—

JAYNE. *Always.* Apparently my deception was not successful.

RON. It was just...

JAYNE. Something happens.

RON. Spared by a ghost.

JAYNE. Do you remember when I bled on your sheets? Yours was the look my father had when the stray dog that I had brought home shit on our carpet. Before then, I was never so fastidious.

RON. I don't know. I don't give a damn. Okay, something happens.
SOMETHING HAPPENS.

JAYNE. Not so loud. The boys.

RON. The boys. The boys. I'm hot. Did you turn the heat up?

JAYNE. I didn't touch it.

RON. There's something whining...

JAYNE. It's water. I've told you that something is wrong with the water pipes. They may be leaking. One day the walls will just collapse.

RON. I'm sweating. Like...Jesus, I can hear their voices. My mother and father arguing in the night. It was so hot and humid. The sheets damp from my body. Screaming. But they stayed together, didn't they? Like cats in a sack held underwater, clawing each other to shreds as they drowned.

JAYNE. I never once did *not want* to have sex with you.

RON. *Reminded me... Yes. The drunk Mexican. MAN. I once saw a woman in a bar finally take the hand of a drunk man who had been hitting on her for a half-hour. She took his hand and his face lit up with triumph and expectation as she led him toward the door and parking lot only to deposit him with the bouncer. His dumb disappointment was like terror. She walked smartly back to her companions like a good soldier who had only done her duty. As if she didn't relish it. You were no less in control, Jayne, when you guided me away.*

(Laughs.)

What a schmuck.

JAYNE. When you walked in, you were furious. I was afraid it might get physical so I defused the situation the best way I could.

RON. If it had gotten physical, I would have pounded the punk into the wall. I'm sure he was shaking in his boots. I've seen guys like that. "I'm a lover, not a fighter." As he slinks away. But you were cool, as if you'd separated your husband from your lovers a hundred times.

JAYNE. What would you have done...if?

RON. I'm sure you'll give me another chance.

JAYNE. If it were the other way around, I would tell you.

RON. Oh, all right then. What would I...*yes*. My father when he caught a male dog who had jumped the fence to copulate with our bitch. He'd let the male dog have its way for a minute while he watched out the kitchen window. He'd wait until they got turned around, and then he'd then run outside with a baseball bat and WHACK, WHACK, WHACK. WHACK, WHACK WHACK.

JAYNE. Poor dog.

RON. Maybe I would have just joined in.

JAYNE. I'm not *that* enlightened.

RON. Then for the love of god, why?

JAYNE. You're looking for an answer that will eliminate the question. Accept that you're powerless to change my mind.

RON. If you were sick and had a fever, I'd give you something for that.

JAYNE. Would you medicate me for your sickness?

RON. *My sickness?*

JAYNE. Yes. I would call possessiveness a sickness.

RON. I don't possess you, for Christ's sake. That's not it. Sometimes in bed, I forget that we are separate. I can't tell if I'm a man dreaming that I'm a couple or a couple dreaming that I'm a man.

JAYNE. Butterflies, plagiarist.

RON. The point is that we are one.

JAYNE. The point is that we aren't anybody. We're ghosts, Ron.

(JAYNE moves to him. She kisses him.)

Ghosts.

RON. *(Soft, pitifully:)* Whack.

JAYNE. Ghosts.

(Blackout.)

Scene 7

(Jayne's study several days later. JAYNE is reading out loud from the computer screen.)

JAYNE. ...but it is only when Krishna reveals his true form to Arjuna, the awful majesty that holds dominion over death, that Arjuna grasps—

(RON enters, holding a yellow legal pad. JAYNE doesn't see him.)

—the insubstantial nature of his own actions. No, no. Expedient nature. Transitional nature. Killing the dead...

RON. John Blum, his name.

(JAYNE turns.)

He was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1966, which makes him *thirty-five*. After graduating high school in 1985, he enrolled in Riverside Community College, which he attended for one semester before dropping out. He subsequently worked—in chronological order—at Burger King, Pizza Hut, McDonald's, Toys 'R' Us and Southy's Shell Station. He was fired from two of the three fast food outlets. Would you like to know which ones?

JAYNE. As fascinating as such information might be, I'll pass.

RON. In 1989, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy. After three months of basic training at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center in Illinois, he was assigned to the USS Amphion, an amphibious repair ship based in Norfolk, Virginia, on which he worked as a boatswain's

mate. After serving two years on the *Amphion*, he was reassigned to the *USS Fairchild*, an aircraft carrier, which was assigned to the Persian Gulf. Blum served on the *Fairchild* during the Gulf War. Several of the planes that bombed Baghdad were the *Fairchild*'s. Upon returning from his glorious tour of duty, Blum and three of his shipmates were arrested by the Virginia Beach Police when they were caught having sex with a 16-year-old girl at the Seawall Motel. The Statutory Rape charges were dropped when it was discovered the girl had been arrested several times for prostitution. The blemish on Blum's record led to a general discharge from the Navy, which changed automatically to an honorable discharge one year later.

JAYNE. You're doing justice to your Pulitzer Prize *nomination*.

(RON sets down the pad.)

RON. The first night the U.S. shelled Baghdad, I was on the street. Before the first wave of Stealth fighters came in, the Iraqis launched Triple-A fire, heavy out of the city. It lit up the sky like fireworks. The first smart bomb took out the communications center no more than 200 yards from me. I ran into an alley. I thought I was going to be killed. I huddled beneath a trash bin shaking. Blood pounding. Bending my head to my chest. I smelled your scent. Not anything you wear but the natural scent of your skin, your oils. I wanted to taste you before I died and I bit into my own arm as if it would release you within me.

JAYNE. Oh...

RON. And that bum—

(RON picks up the pad. His hands are shaking.)

In 1992, his military career at an end, Blum returned to his native St. Louis, where he collected unemployment benefits for six months. In 1993, Blum moved to Los Angeles and quickly landed a job with a janitorial supply company. While selling toilet paper to beer bars and restaurants, he met Mary Formosa, a waitress. In 1994, Blum and Formosa tied the knot. In 1995—

JAYNE. You've made your point.

RON. But we're just getting to the good part.

JAYNE. Do you think I couldn't have compiled information on Claire?

(RON lowers the notepad.)

You should be more careful with the recipients of your e-mails. Keep your groups and individuals clearly delineated.

RON. Claire.

JAYNE. I would never have brought it up, if you hadn't brought *it* up.

RON. Claire was—is—a friend.

JAYNE. It's a shame that you couldn't persuade her to be otherwise.

RON. So *this* is it. FINALLY! It's like when your grandfather died and I couldn't attend the funeral because of commitments. You refused to go to my grandmother's next year. You are a scrupulous bookkeeper, Jayne.

JAYNE. At the time of your grandmother's funeral, I was ill. Nor is Claire a debit.

RON. What does lug nut have on you?

JAYNE. Oh, now he's blackmailing me for sex.

RON. Maybe he is.

JAYNE. Jesus, Ron.

RON. I want answers. I deserve answers.

JAYNE. Do you want me revealed in all my awful majesty?

RON. I want a real marriage. The kind that we vowed to have in front of—

JAYNE. God?

RON. Maybe. I don't know. Maybe.

JAYNE. Our 7-11 god. We needed a church.

RON. *You needed a church.*

JAYNE. I wanted to calm the raging familial seas.

RON. It meant...something, then.

JAYNE. There's little altered, if altered you insist.

*(JAYNE gets up, goes to the wet bar and begins to mix a drink.
RON follows her to the bar and grabs her arm.)*

RON. We have a marriage. And when it goes, all this goes too, you know? This, this, this million-dollar home which I have worked fifty—sixty-hour weeks to pay for. This goes. BOOM! BOOM!

(JAYNE shakes his hand off. She continues to mix her drink.)

JAYNE. I haven't worked?

RON. You have a cleaning lady. You give orders. You don't even buy the ammonia or bleach or whatever it is. You have her take your SUV to be washed.

JAYNE. Josephine comes in twice a month. Just last week I mopped the bathroom. I was down on my hands and knees.

RON. You got drunk when your cousin Eddie was here. You puked on the bathroom floor. You should have gotten down and cleaned it.

JAYNE. That's not fair. I was sick.

RON. Sick, right. Bar hopping with that Irish ass.

JAYNE. I hadn't seen Eddie in a long time. And I've apologized. But since you've devalued my contributions to housework you will at least allow I've put in my time as a mother.

RON. I'll give you the first couple of years with the children, but once they were in school, your life has been largely classes, shopping and book signings.

JAYNE. Soccer. Little League. Basketball. Boy Scouts. Did you forget my term as a den mother? *You try being a den mother.*

(JAYNE sips her drink.)

Umm. Passable.

RON. You're so cool and calm. Those Zen Buddhism classes paid off. I wasn't throwing money away.

JAYNE. What's the sound of one coin jingling?

(RON makes a fist.)

RON. Two testicles squeezed?

JAYNE. My happiness isn't the source of your pain.

RON. Fidelity is an old-fashioned word.

JAYNE. It's part of our evolutionary make-up to want to pass on our genes. For a man to impregnate a woman, to know that she is impregnated by him. The surest way is fidelity, which is why in any patriarchal society a virgin is valuable... She fetches top price.

RON. Save it for your professors.

JAYNE. Oh, fuck you.

RON. FUCK YOU! FUCK YOU! FUCK YOU!

JAYNE. Don't scream. The neighbor's dog will start barking!

RON. That's good. That's ripe. Don't worry about the neighbors hearing this, worry about their dogs Ha, ha, ha. WHACK! WHACK! WHACK!

(RON mixes himself a drink.)

Friends and neighbors, yes. Who have you—

JAYNE. Only Nancy.

RON. Did it get Nancy's approval?

JAYNE. She was baffled.

RON. No kidding.

JAYNE. No kidding.

RON. When will you announce it to the PTA? That will certainly separate the rebels from the conformists.

JAYNE. Dare me?

RON. Why I *double dare you*. But then again, what do you have to lose? Now, let's go the next step and reveal your rutting to—

JAYNE. Our children? Mathew already knows.

RON. Mathew...

JAYNE. He overheard our argument. So I told him...

(RON sets down his drink. RON looks at her in bewilderment. He shakes his head and walks to the door. RON exits. JAYNE stares at the closed door for a moment. She sits down on the couch, waits a few seconds as she fights back tears, and then rises, walks over to the computer and sits down before it. She jiggles the mouse and the screen brightens.)

(Blackout.)

ACT II

Scene 1

(Jayne's study. Day. JAYNE is running a vacuum cleaner over the rug. The vacuum is downstage, so that the cord is stretched out across the floor. She runs the vacuum back and forth over one spot. There's a knock. She continues to vacuum, smiling vacantly. Another knock.)

MATHEW. *(Offstage:)* Mom?

(JAYNE looks toward the door.)

Mom?

(JAYNE shuts off the vacuum.)

JAYNE. Yes, honey?

(The door opens, MATHEW steps in.)

MATHEW. There's someone here to see you. A woman. Mary Blum?

JAYNE. Would you please bring her in, Mathew?

(MATHEW exits. He returns a moment later followed by MARY BLUM. In her late twenties, MARY is pretty, slender and unadorned. She wears a nurse's white pantsuit with her nametag on the pocket. She is expressionless.)

MATHEW. This is my mom.

(MATHEW steps aside to give MARY and JAYNE an unobstructed view of each other. For an instant, MARY seems perplexed, but then recovers her bland expression. MATHEW studies MARY intently as JAYNE walks up to MARY and extends her hand.)

JAYNE. I'm Jayne Sheehan.

MARY. Mary. Mary...Blum.

(MARY receives JAYNE's handshake.)

JAYNE. Please, sit down. May I get you something to drink?

(MARY shakes her head. She looks around the room, walks over to the couch, carefully stepping over the vacuum cleaner cord, and sits down, staring at JAYNE. MATHEW continues to study MARY.)

I think Mary and I would like to be alone.

MATHEW. Oh. Sure. Are you a nurse?

MARY. Why, yes.

MATHEW. I saw your uniform. What hospital?

MARY. St. Jude's in Van Nuys.

MATHEW. Yeah. I went to emergency there once.

(MATHEW steps closer to her and points to his head.)

See this? Twenty stitches. A speaker fell off the shelf above my bed.

MARY. It healed well. I can hardly see the scar.

(Glancing at JAYNE.)

When was that?

MATHEW. I don't know. Five or six years ago, I guess.

MARY. Oh, well I wasn't there.

MATHEW. I've got this other scar on my—

(MATHEW yanks at his pant leg.)

JAYNE. Mathew.

MATHEW. Sure, mom.

(MATHEW nods and backs out of the room. He smiles flirtatiously at MARY as he closes the door behind him. MARY looks around the room.)

JAYNE. St. Jude's is an excellent facility. Have you worked there long?

MARY. Three years.

(JAYNE walks over to the wall and pulls out the vacuum's plug.)

JAYNE. My mother vacuumed on Fridays. So I vacuum on Fridays. As I grow older I find myself mimicking her habits and idiosyncrasies, something I swore I'd never do.

(She coils the cord around the vacuum.)

Cleanliness is next to Godliness. My mother never actually said that but she had a wooden plaque on the refrigerator that had the Ten Commandments of the housewife. That was number one.

MARY. Yes, I've seen those...

JAYNE. I wonder where you get them anyway?

MARY. Ask your mother.

JAYNE. My mother and father died in an automobile crash ten years ago, St. Christopher's vigil on the dashboard notwithstanding. I gave all her bric-a-brac to the Salvation Army.

(JAYNE rolls the vacuum to the back of the room. She walks to the couch.)

What...area do you do work in?

MARY. Pre-op.

JAYNE. What do you do in *pre-op*?

MARY. I don't think it would interest you.

JAYNE. Please.

MARY. We prepare the patients for surgery. I—I take their vitals, shave them and sedate them.

JAYNE. You *shave them*. Men and women?

MARY. I shave them all.

JAYNE. Do you find that the men are embarrassed when you shave their groins? I mean no doubt you're touching their penises and testicles.

(MARY doesn't answer.)

MARY. When John comes home, beneath the soap, he smells of you.

JAYNE. As with Vermouth in a martini, I usually just wave the perfume bottle beneath my ears. But I'll make a note of that. Hold the perfume, Jayne.

MARY. This is funny?

JAYNE. No, no... I'm a little nervous myself.

(MARY stares at JAYNE.)

MARY. Have I met you before?

JAYNE. I don't think so.

MARY. For a second there...

(JAYNE, too, studies MARY, her eyes narrowing with a trace of recognition.)

You're in love with my husband?

JAYNE. No. I hope I didn't give you that impression.

MARY. What do you want? Why did you ask me to come here?

JAYNE. I hate lies.

MARY. Oh?

JAYNE. Lies are the enemy disguised as friends. Oh they'll get you over a little hump—here and there, but they're leading you toward the precipice, and when you get there, they'll give you a last shove.

MARY. My mother taught me not to lie. I haven't needed more instruction.

JAYNE. Thank you. I want...your permission.

MARY. *My*—you're not serious?

JAYNE. I don't want to take John away from you. I just want part of his time.

MARY. You are a snotty bitch. At least the others...

(Pause.)

Is that it? You think I give my husband...

(MARY buries her face in her hands for an instant.)

JAYNE. I'm sorry. I don't—

MARY. That's the way it's done? Simple as that.

JAYNE. If you'll let it be.

MARY. So all of us just do what we want without a care of how it affects others?

JAYNE. We can care for others without pitying them, which is usually fear for ourselves. Fear that we may occupy their position.

MARY. Answer my question, for god's sake!

JAYNE. We're not responsible for the happiness of others, whether that happiness is the simplest of bodily pleasures or the most sublime intellectual contentment.

MARY. The devil never defended sin so well.

JAYNE. Mary, I grew up Catholic. The list of sins is dazzling. Don't you think some of the sins are ludicrous? You're a Catholic, but you yourself take birth control, which is evil in the church.

MARY. John told you that? You talked about me?

JAYNE. I wanted to know about you.

MARY. I'd rather have him sleeping with you than talking about me.

JAYNE. I'm sorry.

MARY. I think you're a rich idle—I should give you permission? Is that what it takes to wash away your guilt?

JAYNE. Permission isn't for me. It's for you.

MARY. For shame.

JAYNE. If you can give it sincerely, the burden will be lifted.

MARY. Jesus! A sermon!

JAYNE. It's guilt I'm for shedding. I'm sorry, Mary.

MARY. I didn't come here for your sympathy. I didn't come here to ask you to give up John. Oh, I may not be as versed as you in all the big words, but I do know that no woman ever gave up a man because another woman asked her to.

JAYNE. Then—

MARY. I just wanted to know what I was dealing with.

JAYNE. You make me sound like a virus.

MARY. No virus kills the body it doesn't infect.

(MARY gets up. She looks at her tag and removes it. She walks toward the door. JAYNE touches her shoulder.)

JAYNE. If you don't want me to tell John that you were here—

MARY. I have NO SUCH AGREEMENT WITH JOHN. Do you understand that? I will have no such agreement with my husband. What's the point of marriage then?

(MARY exits.)

(Blackout.)

Scene 2

(Jayne's room, a week later. Mid-afternoon. JOHN is sitting on the couch. He rises, walks over to the door, looks around, and then walks over to the bookshelf. He taps the orchid. RON enters.)

RON. Be careful.

(JOHN jerks his head around.)

Jayne cherishes that orchid. She's kept it alive and blooming for five years.

JOHN. Oh. Sorry. I didn't mean. I was just—waiting. Actually, I was waiting for...*Jayne.*

RON. My *wife*, Jayne.

JOHN. She got a call from the school.

RON. Oh?

JOHN. I think she'll be right back.

RON. You think so?

JOHN. She *said* she'd be right back.

RON. I'm sure she will. I told her I was coming home early today.

(JOHN sticks his hands in his pockets and smiles.)

Who are you anyway?

JOHN. Oh. John. I'm John.

(JOHN yanks his hands out of his pockets and crosses the room to RON. JOHN extends his hand and shakes. RON fakes a painful wince.)

RON. Jesus. What a grip. Work out, huh?

JOHN. Once in awhile.

RON. Squats, bench presses and upright rows. That's all you need. But do them right. Don't cheat. With the squats go all the way down. Heel to butt.

(RON demonstrates a squat.)

Try it. Go ahead.

(JOHN imitates RON, but starts to lose his balance part way down. RON grips JOHN's shoulder.)

JOHN. This is kind of tough, you know? Really.

RON. A lot of guys are afraid of squats. They fear they'll injure their lower back. You see some guys at the gym wearing those thick leather belts. Belts don't help at all. The only thing that will help you from injuring your lower back is the stomach muscles. But hey, I'm telling *you* this stuff. A guy with *your* grip?

JOHN. You're clowning me, ain't you?

RON. *Who* are you? *What* are you doing here?

JOHN. I'm a friend of Jayne's.

RON. Oh, you're like *a friend* of Jayne's. Jayne, *my* wife.

JOHN. Maybe I should take off.

RON. I apologize if I make you nervous. You have to understand, I'm a little paranoid. Some guy named John has been dropping by my house to have sex with my wife. So I hear the name John and well, I get all knotted inside. I mean, I know you're not the guy, because if you were you'd be jumping out that window now. Because you can't be sure that a husband, no matter how harmless he appears, doesn't have rage in his heart and a forty-five in his waistband.

(RON reaches behind his back. JOHN merely smiles.)

JOHN. Jayne, like, did this, huh? Put us together.

RON. It's Jayne's way of erasing the lie that she used to pull us apart.

JOHN. Cool. You gonna shoot me?

RON. You're a cocky sonofabitch.

JOHN. *(Shrugging:)* Hey.

RON. I think you're balding.

JOHN. Give me a break, man. I'm just playing by your wife's rules. No need to get personal.

(JOHN walks over to the couch and flops down.)

You've got a nice place here, you know. What's it go for, four hundred, five hundred thousand?

RON. If you're planning to make an offer, you should probably get a job first. Banks like to see a little work history before extending credit.

JOHN. It's tough out there.

RON. But it keeps your afternoons open, doesn't it?

JOHN. I've been reading your stories in the paper.

(JOHN puts his feet on the coffee table.)

RON. Get your feet off the table.

JOHN. Sure. Sure. I like the way you put it to them. Corporate bloodsuckers, right? I agree with a lot of what you say. You're a smart man.

RON. I know my leeches.

JOHN. What you get paid for a job like that?

RON. It's confidence, isn't it? But you've had practice.

JOHN. You're over my head, man.

(RON walks over to the bookshelf and picks up the family photo.)

RON. You know about the children?

JOHN. I've seen the family album.

RON. Think quick!

(RON tosses the photo well short of JOHN's reach. The photo drops to the floor. The glass cracks. JOHN stretches to pick it up.)

JOHN. Well, that wasn't smart.

(JOHN glances at the photo, then hands it to RON, who sets it back on the shelf.)

RON. You think you're real to her, but you're just an idealization. You're not a man, you're just an experiment. A guinea pig. A lab rat. But what do you care if you ejaculate between her warm thighs?

JOHN. That's right, brother.

RON. You've got no self-respect, have you?

JOHN. I didn't tell my wife she could go get herself a boyfriend.

RON. I specifically said a guy with a big—

(JOHN laughs.)

JOHN. I like you. You know that, Ron?

RON. And I like you too, John. I'm proud to know a scumbag of your caliber.

(JOHN rises.)

JOHN. I gotta get out of here.

RON. I specifically said a boyfriend with a big—hey, let me see what you've got down there, Johnny-boy!

(RON reaches for JOHN's crotch and grabs it. JOHN doesn't move. RON holds JOHN as they stare each other down. When RON releases him, his hand trembles. RON steps back, like a boxer trying to get his wind.)

I trained the dog that bit me. Jayne once hated everything. She was an anarchist. I don't mean she broke store windows or attached bombs to the underside of cars, not anything like that. It was all kept close to her breast, like a boxer waiting for an opening. Oh, there were occasional outbursts, willful acts. Maybe it was just a gestation period. On the surface everything was calm. But underneath. It was like one of those Caribbean tourist islands, where the workers are all smiles and happy laughter, but underneath they'd like to slaughter the tourists. Jayne rejected everything in the adult world, but she hadn't replaced it with anything. Do you know that she wouldn't read a book because her parents were readers. I don't mean she couldn't read. She just wouldn't. Her parents refused to buy a TV, but she found an old black and white that someone had thrown out and she put it in her room and she watched it 24 hours a day even if the sound was inaudible and the picture unintelligible. But you don't want to hear all this stuff. You've got it good. That's all you know. You don't want to give it up.

JOHN. Tell your wife I couldn't wait.

RON. *Sorry, honey, the extortionist had to be on his way.*

JOHN. You watch your mouth, pal.

RON. How did you like Soledad? Feed you well?

(JOHN crosses the room to RON.)

JOHN. Maybe that newspaper of yours would like to know—

(JAYNE enters.)

JAYNE. I was considering the dog park.

(RON and JOHN separate.)

Are you okay, John?

RON. Sure he's okay. We were just trading old war stories.

(RON goes over to the wet bar and mixes a drink.)

John, how 'bout you?

JOHN. No. No thanks.

RON. Oh, come on, lighten up. One to cut the drought. I can hear your thirst. When the rivers dry up, the dying fish spit at each other. Will men be so kind? Why your tongue is almost hanging out.

JOHN. Oh, well, all right.

RON. Cool, *duuddde*.

(RON mixes the drinks.)

I propose a toast. To world peace. The brotherhood of men. I read something. Something. Somewhere. Somewhere. Somewhere. The wife...takes on a lover. The old man perceives a change in her looks. The little brats become angels. Her household chores interest her again, like the old days. She whispers the details over drinks in a dark restaurant to her best friends, Because to be the lover of a—*Graham Greene, Graham Greene it was—a famous man* increases her self-esteem. The adventure is over. Romance has begun. But you're not a famous man, are you, John? You're no Pulitzer-nominated writer. Huh?

JAYNE. Stop being an ass, Ron.

RON. I'm in a funk. But, I know the way to get out of it. I'll get out of myself. Let's try role reversal. The old staple of group therapy. Let's put ourselves in someone else's shoes. Jayne, you be me. John, you be Jayne. And I'll be John.

JAYNE. Why do we have to be anyone? Why don't we abandon our identities entirely?

RON. We'll play *your* game next. But I suggested *my* game first.

JOHN. What's going on?

(RON goes to the bookshelf and pulls out a volume. He thumbs through the pages. He grins and hands the book to JOHN.)

RON. Jayne marks and memorizes salient passages. When it's your turn to speak just read one of the passages from—

(RON grabs the book back, looks at the cover, and then hands it back to JOHN.)

Chuang Tze, Basic Writings.

JOHN. You mean any one?

RON. Now you're getting it. The bedrock wisdom of the east. Go head, try it.

(JOHN opens the book.)

JOHN. Are you sure?

RON. Really. I mean, yes.

JOHN. *(Reading:)* What is acceptable we call acceptable; what is unacceptable we call unacceptable. A road is made by people walking on it; things are so because they are called so. What makes them so? Making them so makes them so. What makes them not so? Making them not so makes them not so.

(He looks up.)

Should I—

(RON nods.)

Things all must have that which is so; things all must have that which is acceptable. There is nothing that is not so, nothing that is not acceptable.

(He looks up.)

That's the end—

JAYNE. *(Imitating RON:)* It's all mystical bullshit. I didn't want to say it. I've been patronizing you for years. But I want you to know how they've pulled the wool over your eyes.

RON. *(Imitating JOHN:)* Huh? I guess. Well, maybe.

(RON points to JOHN, who frowns. He flips through the pages.)

JOHN. The ills of the world whether, war or disease, are only such because man sees them as such. If they are not labeled as such, they would no longer be ills, but merely seen as an in—in-*evitable* part of life.

JAYNE. And what is the difference between that and Christianity, where the poor will inherit the earth...in due time. The masters always encourage that kind of thing.

RON. Um, maybe. Yes. No, Maybe. Well, actually. Hey, that's not bad! Really. I mean actually.

JOHN. Go to hell!

(JOHN slams the book shut and sets it down.)

RON. You ain't two hundred miles offshore now, baby!

JOHN. Huh?

RON. Consequences! CONSEQUENCES!

JOHN. You're like loony, you know?

RON. I'll bet you were shaking, puking, calling for Mama. MAMA! MAMA!

JOHN. You think it's you know like my fault that you can't keep your wife under control? That ain't my fault.

JAYNE. John, that's ridiculous.

RON. What a *mystery* to unravel.

JOHN. (To JAYNE:) I didn't mean that.

RON. Get out. Get out of my house!

JAYNE. *Your house?* What about *our* house?

JOHN. I'm going, okay, man?

JAYNE. We'll talk tomorrow.

(JOHN exits. RON sits down on the couch, puts his elbows on his knees and rests his head on his fingertips.)

RON. It's a shame his wife couldn't have come over also. We could have played cards.

JAYNE. She's already been here.

RON. You don't miss a trick, Jayne...

JAYNE. I was following my instincts. I felt that I had to meet her.

RON. I can imagine what she's like.

JAYNE. She's a good and sweet woman. She was upset.

RON. No, upset?

JAYNE. Well, of course, upset, but—

RON. Collateral damage. You drop a bomb. It kills people, but then it also destroys the land making it impossible for crops to be grown, cattle to graze.

JAYNE. Now I'm napalming villages. Please, Ron.

(She sits down beside him.)

RON. You've taken her husband. For what it's worth...

JAYNE. What? Abducted?

RON. You know what I mean.

JAYNE. No, I don't know. He's doing what he wants to do. I'm doing what I want to do.

RON. I want to fly.

JAYNE. Then fly if you can.

RON. I want my hands around your throat.

(RON spreads his fingers around her throat.)

JAYNE. Go ahead. If it makes you happy.

(RON tightens his grip.)

Oh, God...

(RON draws his hands from her neck and slides them along her cheeks and into her hair.)

You agreed!

RON. YES. SURE! I AGREED!

(Blackout.)

Scene 3

(The light comes up on JAYNE and RON standing side by side.)

JAYNE. Why?

RON. I admitted it. Isn't that enough? Isn't that what you've wanted?

JAYNE. No. Why?

RON. I don't know. Jesus... It's—It's like when you're a kid and you're standing with your friends in a high place, above water. Someone's daring you to jump. You know you shouldn't. The water is murky, something that could hurt you may be waiting down there. But you jump anyway, because someone says you won't, and something inside you says you won't either. So you jump. He goes or I'm out.

JAYNE. But you've admitted—

RON. A moral blackout.

(JAYNE wipes her eyes.)

What—

JAYNE. Hold me a second, Ron.

(He turns to her, but instead of holding her, he takes her hand. He leads her from the bedroom and across the stage, where he opens a door.)

What—

RON. See. They breathe in synchronicity. When I get up at night and can't sleep, I go and watch them sleep. It's so beautifully certain. But soon, like Mathew, the boys too will be too old for watching.

(They watch the twins sleep.)

JAYNE. It doesn't seem that long ago that they were at my breast. Look, Ego—*Sean* kicks off his sheets. The scar on his knee glows in the dark.

RON. Will he always be the taller?

JAYNE. Yes.

RON. And will Liam always lick his lip until it cracks?

JAYNE. Oh, yes.

RON. I could stand here forever. God is generous.

JAYNE. What's that?... Music. Mathew's room.

RON. I can't hear anything...

JAYNE. Listen.

(They listen. RON nods. They watch the sleeping boys.)

RON. Is it dawn yet?

(JAYNE takes his hand and leads him from the room.)

Help me. I'm crumbling.

JAYNE. Come back to bed.

RON. No.

(JAYNE tugs at him and laughs.)

No.

(JAYNE draws him to her.)

No.

(He backs away and leaves her.)

(Blackout.)

Scene 4

(Jayne's study. MATHEW is sitting on a stool, a towel pulled up to his neck, while JAYNE cuts his hair. JAYNE makes a final pass with the scissors.)

JAYNE. There.

(She shows MATHEW his haircut in the hand mirror.)

MATHEW. Looks good.

(JAYNE removes the sheet. MATHEW doesn't move. JAYNE gives him a nudge under the elbow.)

JAYNE. Come on. The barbershop's closed.

(MATHEW gets off the stool, but lingers. He picks up a book on the console. He looks at it.)

It's a book about nothing. Physicists are beginning to think that everything is empty space. The stars, the earth that book itself, nothing but space folded into innumerable patterns. The Maya of Hinduism. An Origami universe. Which leaves us as dreams dreaming dreams.

(Pause.)

Where are Ego and Eco?

MATHEW. They're over at—Arthur's...skateboarding.

JAYNE. That's right... I'm sorry, Mathew, I have to work. I have to finish my paper.

MATHEW. You never cut Sean's and Liam's hair, do you mom?

JAYNE. They won't let me. They get nervous when they see scissors in my hand. They run away.

MATHEW. You may be getting phone calls, mom. Just hang up on them.

JAYNE. You'll have to give me more information than that.

MATHEW. I was talking to this guy at school. Ralph Mars.

JAYNE. That name sounds familiar.

MATHEW. He was in Cub Scouts.

JAYNE. The dark-haired boy with lice. *Ralphy.*

MATHEW. What?

JAYNE. One week he had long jet-black hair and the following week he was bald. Lice had infested the schools. Your teacher sent you home with a note recommending that I check your hair and if I spotted any lice to use a special shampoo, which would kill them. It was blue. I spent hours combing through your hair, and Sean's and Liam's too, of course. I held you between my legs and hunted my prey like a lion. You were still and accepted my efforts, but Sean and Liam, how they squirmed. Fortunately, we were lice free.

(JAYNE drops her hand to her thigh.)

I itch just thinking—

(Laughs.)

MATHEW. What?

JAYNE. *Ralphy Mars, yes.*

MATHEW. Anyway we were talking about his parents. He was going on about how messed-up they were and how much he hated them. And I told him about you. How cool you were. And I guess I told him about your having a lover and how you thought it was all right, and how you didn't try to hide it from dad or anything. He got real interested.

JAYNE. You shouldn't have.

MATHEW. He was telling me everything and I thought I had to give something back. Anyway I didn't think much of it, but then some other guy came up to me and asked me if it was true. I told him, no, but then another guy—

JAYNE. They'll have me a whore.

MATHEW. It's not funny. They've seen you. They know who you are. They're stupid. They'll call. They will.

JAYNE. Then let them call. I'll explain that I gave teenage boys up when I was a teenage girl. I hardly liked them then. Pimplly and salivating although some could be cute in their puppy-dog way.

MATHEW. They're not puppy dogs.

JAYNE. I suppose I can absorb a few breathless phone calls and even graffiti on the overpass. I just hope they spell my name right.

MATHEW. Ralph said he was coming to the house.

JAYNE. He will be politely turned away.

MATHEW. I'd like to put a cap up Ralph's ass.

JAYNE. Don't be a phony, Matty. Whatever you do, don't pose.

MATHEW. Mom, I'm a killer.

JAYNE. With dirty glasses.

(She takes off his glasses, but he pulls them back from her and sets them back on. He walks over to the couch and sits down.)

MATHEW. I'm thinking of changing my hairstyle. Maybe going blue.

JAYNE. I've always liked men in magenta.

(He bends his head, thinking for a couple of seconds. He jerks his head up.)

MATHEW. Dad might, huh?

JAYNE. No.

MATHEW. He might, mom. You can never tell.

(MATHEW rises from the couch and exits. JAYNE sits down on the couch. She puts her hand to her lips and is still with thought.)

(Blackout.)

Scene 5

(Stage is dark. Sounds of sex. The lights come up on Jayne's study. JAYNE and JOHN are sprawled on the floor, recently disentangled)

and putting on their clothes. Behind them, the vacuum cleaner is plugged into the wall. Dressed first, JAYNE rises and walks to the window, while JOHN finishes dressing. He pats his hand against his shirt.)

JOHN. I'm drenched. Sopping. I mean, you can really move. You're like a machine. You know?

JAYNE. Space Annihilator?

JOHN. No, nothing like—Space what?

JAYNE. When a man gets weak, a woman gets strong. They say...

(JOHN embraces her from behind and kisses her neck.)

JOHN. I thought that after the other night. I mean with your husband.

(JAYNE turns and pulls away. Somewhat agitated, she walks away from him.)

JAYNE. Ron admitted that he agreed.

JOHN. No shit? Really?

JAYNE. Yes, *REALLY*. Do you have to do that so much? That *really* thing?

JOHN. Huh?

JAYNE. Stop saying *REALLY*! Am I making myself *CLEAR*?

JOHN. Yeah, sure.

(JAYNE turns back to the window.)

JAYNE. It's been warm lately. Unseasonably warm. The wind hasn't blown in days. It's been very still out there. Earthquake weather.

(She shivers.)

Can you pay me back that money now, John?

JOHN. Next week for sure.

JAYNE. You said that last week.

(JOHN embraces her.)

JOHN. Re—I don't think so.

JAYNE. You promised to pay me back in a month.

JOHN. What you gonna do? Break my legs?

(JAYNE pulls away from him and walks over to her computer console. She picks up a bound sheaf of papers. She reads it to herself, paying no attention to JOHN. He moves to her again.)

Whatcha got there?

JAYNE. My term paper.

JOHN. Yeah. I was going to ask you about that. I'm really going to need some help.

JAYNE. I'll read what you have and evaluate it.

JOHN. Well, you see that's kind of the problem. I don't have anything.

JAYNE. You haven't started?

JOHN. Oh, no, sure I started. I just haven't been able to get much down.

JAYNE. You haven't written your paper?

JOHN. Hey, don't act like a mom.

JAYNE. I am a mom. You didn't write one word?

JOHN. I was hoping you could do me a favor? Like maybe—

JAYNE. Like maybe write your paper for you?

JOHN. It doesn't have to be real good.

JAYNE. (*Laughs.*) Ah, you want me to write a bad paper for you?

JOHN. Bad's good. Long as I get a pass. I took the course pass-fail.

JAYNE. I'm not going to write your paper. What have you been spending your time doing?

(JOHN grabs her ass.)

JOHN. Making my mom come. Come on. You can knock off that paper in a couple of hours. I'll massage your neck while you'll do it. Or I'll give you a little C action.

(JOHN ushers her toward the computer seat. She pulls away from him.)

JAYNE. No.

JOHN. I need those credits. That stuff is just too weird for me. I can't get into it.

JAYNE. You shouldn't have taken the course.

JOHN. You think I wanted to take that course? I caught you looking at me as we were walking across the campus. I was going to take a course in real estate and I saw you looking at me and I followed you into that class, just to talk to you. Just to be by you.

JAYNE. I thought Hinduism intrigued you?

JOHN. Well, sure. Jesus, I thought you'd be impressed. I took the course just for you and now you're gonna have me fail it.

JAYNE. You couldn't have just waited for me after class?

JOHN. I thought you might think I was a stalker or something.

JAYNE. *Something*, yes... There was no accident, was there, John? No Russians, no Poles. No threatened lawsuits. If you needed money you could have just asked me. But you chose to lie instead.

(He grabs her hand.)

JOHN. You want to see the dent, bitch?

JAYNE. Let go of me.

JOHN. Call me a liar, huh?

JAYNE. I want my money.

JOHN. Your money? Give me a break. Look at this house.

(JOHN releases her hand and looks around.)

Do my paper. I'll find that money.

JAYNE. I won't be an enabler for cheaters.

JOHN. Without you, I wouldn't have been able to cheat on my wife.

JAYNE. You've found plenty of enablers.

JOHN. What are you talking about?

JAYNE. I've spoken with Mary.

JOHN. You called her?

JAYNE. I called her and then I had her come over.

JOHN. My wife? She was here? Are you crazy?

JAYNE. I thought it for the best.

JOHN. Best? You—you—you—NO. What kind of—I don't. MAN!

JAYNE. She knew about the others.

JOHN. Others?

JAYNE. She smelled them on you.

JOHN. Oh, man. Do you know what you've done?

(He grabs her.)

JAYNE. You're hurting me!

(JOHN releases her. He holds up his hands.)

JOHN. Sorry. Sorry. I'd never hurt you. Never.

(JOHN touches her thigh.)

It's just you gotta understand. This stuff doesn't go beyond here. When you take it out there, that's getting into my personal life. You see, you're gonna call her again. You got this idea in your head about me. But nothing happened. You wanted something to happen, but nothing happened.

JAYNE. I won't do that.

JOHN. Why would you want to mess up a good thing? This is just about a perfect situation.

JAYNE. It's...mysterious.

JOHN. No, it's okay. You've just gotta explain it to her.

JAYNE. But I have faith in the honesty of my mysteries.

JOHN. What the hell's that mean?

JAYNE. I think it's played itself out.

JOHN. Oh, yeah?

JAYNE. It's inexplicable, bewildering, perplexing and illogical, but it's just gone.

(JOHN touches her. JAYNE puts her hands on his chest. She holds him off.)

I'm sorry.

JOHN. I like it here.

JAYNE. Please go, John.

(JOHN grabs her wrist.)

JOHN. You don't want to make trouble.

JAYNE. It's over.

JOHN. She'll believe it, you know? Who wouldn't?

JAYNE. I want you to leave now.

(JOHN twists her wrist.)

You're hurting me!

JOHN. You tell my wife? You break up my marriage? Who do you think you are, you old slut!

(With her free hand, JAYNE picks up the Buddha and rams it into his forehead.)

JOHN. Unh!...Goddamn!

(JOHN lets her go and backs away, touching his forehead.)

Goddamn! I'm bleeding.

JAYNE. Get out of my room.

(JOHN looks at his hand, and then at JAYNE.)

JOHN. What are you, huh? Just what are you?

(JOHN flicks the blood on his fingers to the carpet. He walks toward the door.)

He's a lucky man. Oh, yeah.

(JOHN smiles, touches his forehead again, flicks down the blood and exits.)

(Blackout.)

Scene 6

(Jayne's study. The vacuum cleaner is against the far wall, plugged into a receptacle. MATHEW enters followed by MARY, who is carrying a purse.)

MARY. When will your mother be home?

MATHEW. Any moment. She went out to buy something. She'll be right back any moment.

(MARY stops in the center of the room, clutching her purse close to her. MATHEW circles MARY. She is hardly aware of his movement. He studies her.)

Did she know you were coming?

(MARY shakes her head.)

My mother always keeps her appointments.

MARY. You don't have to wait here with me. I'll be all right...alone.

MATHEW. How old are you?

MARY. Oh. Did you say something? I'm sorry.

MATHEW. I asked you how old you were? You're not over thirty are you?

MARY. Twenty-eight.

MATHEW. You look like Jennifer Love Hewitt. You know, the actress.

MARY. I don't know her.

(MARY looks down at her purse, then at MATHEW, who is now ogling her. To avoid his stare, she looks toward the bookcase.)

So many books...

MATHEW. My mother's read all of them. Some she reads over and over. Source material, she says... I can point to any book on the shelf and she can quote me the opening sentence. I can do some of them. Go ahead, pick one out and see if I can do it.

(MARY doesn't respond.)

Go ahead. Just point your finger.

(After much concentration, MARY points to one.)

No, not that one. Try again.

(MARY points again.)

MATHEW. Preserved in a cave for over twenty thousand years, a female speaks about the minds of our early Western ancestors. Now go ahead, pick it up and read the first page.

(MARY hesitates. She slips her arm through the straps of her purse and with her upper arm holds her purse to her body. She pulls the book off the shelf and opens it.)

Read it.

MARY. *(Self-consciously:)* This book opens the door. The key—

(MATHEW snatches the book away.)

MATHEW. *That's* the introduction, not the first page. There's always an introduction, you know. Here.

(He turns to another page and hands the book back to MARY.)

MARY. Preserved in a cave sanctuary for over twenty thousand years, a female figure speaks to us about the minds of our early Western ancestors.

(Nodding.)

That was nearly perfect.

MATHEW. It *was* perfect.

(MATHEW snatches the book away and places it back on the shelf. He stands behind her.)

Do you and your husband have an arrangement?

(MARY pretends not to hear. MATHEW places his hand on her shoulder, ostensibly brushing away something, but he keeps his hand there.)

You know if you want to be with someone...or he wants to be with someone...

MARY. Please don't—

MATHEW. Hey, more people have arrangements than you would think. Because society says it's wrong. Religion says it's wrong. But it's all just to keep people in line. How can anything that gives pleasure between two people be evil? I don't think you really think it's wrong, not when you think about it like that.

(MATHEW tries to kiss her, but she turns her face away.)

Come on, lighten up.

MARY. You must not—

(MATHEW again tries to kiss her. She cries.)

MATHEW. Hey, what's wrong?

(MARY cries harder, but the tears change to laughter.)

Are you laughing at me? Stop laughing. That's stupid.

(He moves threateningly toward her.)

I said stop laughing!

(MARY stops laughing. She stares at him with pity. MATHEW puts his hand on her breast and caresses it. JAYNE enters carrying a shopping bag. She drops the bag.)

JAYNE. Mathew!

(As MATHEW turns his head, JAYNE crosses the room to him. She slaps him. MATHEW doesn't react. She grabs his arm and pulls him. Her action is so forceful that it spins MATHEW backwards.)

JAYNE. What are you doing?

(To MARY:) What did he do to you?

(MARY doesn't respond.)

Apologize. You're not like this, Mathew. This is not you. Apologize this instant!

MATHEW. I hate you!

JAYNE. Mathew!

MATHEW. All you. Nothing but you.

JAYNE. That's not it—

MATHEW. I hate you. I hate you!

(JAYNE tries to touch him, but he recoils.)

JAYNE. Mathew, listen.

(He lays his hand against his cheek, where she hit him. Tears well up.)

MATHEW. You're nothing. You're an illusion. None of you, *none of you*, are real.

JAYNE. Matty, honey—

(JAYNE touches his arm, but he draws away.)

MATHEW. Leave me alone!

(MATHEW darts from the room.)

JAYNE. When he calms down, I'll speak with him.

(MARY slips her arm out of her purse straps, but continues to hold her purse to her tightly.)

MARY. It's about John.

JAYNE. Of course.

(Pause. Then rushed:) Do you want something to drink?

MARY. No.

JAYNE. Well, I'm going to have one.

(JAYNE goes to the wet bar and mixes a Martini.)

You don't drink?

MARY. I drink.

(JAYNE pours herself a drink.)

JAYNE. I never thought I would like Martinis either. My mother and father drank them...

(JAYNE opens an olive jar and with a toothpick impales an olive. She draws it up to her eye level.)

She always had three olives with her drink. Three.

(JAYNE sticks the toothpick in again and adds two olives. She drops the trio in her drink. She looks toward the door.)

I worry about my son. He may be paying the price for my inwardness. As I find my way, he may be losing his.

(She sips her drink.)

My younger sons, the twins, now they're a handful. But they know their own minds. Independent. I won't have to worry about them. Myself, I was kicked out of parochial school in the second grade. I bit a nun.

(JAYNE takes another sip of her Martini.)

I can still taste her blood on my teeth.

(MARY takes a loud breath. JAYNE looks at MARY and gestures with the glass.)

Are you sure?

MARY. Maybe, maybe I'll have a small one.

(JAYNE pours another Martini. She hands MARY the drink. MARY sits down on the couch, holds the Martini at arm's length for a moment, and then brings it to her lips and drinks deeply. As she sets the glass down, it slips from her hands to the floor. She grabs her mouth and bends over.)

JAYNE. What is it?

MARY. Please. I need, oh—

(JAYNE lifts the plant on the coffee table from its dish and holds the dish up to MARY. MARY dry heaves several times. She catches her breath. She straightens and waves the dish away.)

I thought it would have stopped, but something happens...

JAYNE. Oh...

MARY. I got pregnant.

JAYNE. But I thought—

MARY. I took the pills. I got pregnant all the same.

(JAYNE sets the dish back and retrieves the fallen Martini glass.)

JAYNE. A baby, that's wonderful.

MARY. Is it?

JAYNE. It's *miraculous*, Mary.

MARY. I took...the pills.

JAYNE. The natural processes of your body triumphed against the drugs. You may be a forerunner.

MARY. I don't know...

JAYNE. Sometimes I think I'm a forerunner, too. We're forerunners, Mary. The pack falls behind as we increase our distance.

(MARY stares at JAYNE in bewilderment.)

So, how does Joe feel about your having a baby?

MARY. Joe?

JAYNE. Joe? Did I say “Joe?” Oh!

(Laughs.)

Don’t you see? Mary. Joseph. Baby. Nun’s blood. Martinis.

(Soberly:) John. I meant John, of course.

MARY. It’s over with me and John. John’s all yours.

JAYNE. *Mine?* Mary, you’ve misunderstood—

MARY. He’s yours.

(JAYNE sips her drink thoughtfully.)

I’d like another drink, if you don’t mind.

JAYNE. Are you sure, Mary? If you’re pregnant...

MARY. I will not have it. I don’t want his child. I want nothing of him.

JAYNE. Oh.

(JAYNE takes MARY’s glass to the bar and refills it. JAYNE returns to the couch with MARY’s drink, but she doesn’t hand it to her.)

I’m no longer seeing your husband.

MARY. I’d like my drink.

(JAYNE hands her the drink. JAYNE walks back to the bar, puts three olives on a toothpick, returns to MARY and drops them in her drink. MARY stirs the drink, and then chews one of the olives off the toothpick.)

JAYNE. I think you’d make a good mother.

MARY. And you’d know?

JAYNE. I think *I’ve* been a good mother.

MARY. Then you should have ten more.

JAYNE. Oh that would take a miracle, which are nearly extinct on this globe. I’ve had a full hysterectomy. Uterus gone. Ovary right

gone. Ovary left gone. All gone. Bye, bye. I think it fascinating that we have all our eggs from infancy. Thousands of tiny eggs just sitting there dormant, just sitting there while we go through all our experiences, unchanging, pristine. While we jump rope and finger-paint, our little eggs sit there in their baskets.

(JAYNE puts her hand to her throat.)

MARY. Umm.

JAYNE. I think you should try meditation, Mary.

MARY. I took the pills...

JAYNE. I sometimes walk in the woods and meditate. In the stillness and quiet, I escape myself. I'm no longer aware of duality, but oneness. Aware and one. It's bliss. Measureless bliss. Like an orgasm that you hope will go on and on...

(JAYNE gestures toward the window.)

See that tree, Mary? Mimosa. Mimosa. In the backyard of the house in which I grew up we had a huge mimosa tree. I made love to my first boy in that tree, balanced on a bifurcated branch, an act of extreme courage, balance and agility. I was fourteen.

(MARY sips her drink, half-listening, slipping into reverie.)

MARY. We had a peach tree...

JAYNE. I had an orgasm. That very first time. How amazing and mysterious that was. In a million years I never, never, never expected...*perfection.*

(Laughs.)

That night I sat at the dinner table smiling at my parents, inexplicably from their point of view, knowing that a boy had been inside me an hour before. That his semen was still inside me as I sat and ate my pot roast.

MARY. The peaches were green and hard.

JAYNE. My parents were highly educated, in the conventional sense. Teachers and pillars of the community. Irish Catholics, but not the joyous, shouting, whiskey-drinking kind. They were the pi-

ous, quiet, *Martini-drinking* kind, and mean—passive aggressive. Their marriage was devoid of anything remotely like passion. They slept together but they didn't sleep together like lovers, more like a brother and sister who are forced to share a bed before the time that such intimacy might let them forget that they were siblings. Just once I would have liked to hear their bed squeak or my mother moaning in the night. Or perhaps my father complaining that he needed it from her.

MARY. Never ripened. Never.

JAYNE. So I made love to boys on their clean Macy's sheets. The stains of my lovemaking with teenage boys branded the bedclothes. Moist beneath them, but in the middle of the bed. Unexplored. Unnoticed.

(Pause.)

But never again would I make love in the Mimosa tree.

(Pause.)

I sometimes wonder if I ever did...

MARY. Don't eat the peaches, my mother would say. They'll make you sick.

JAYNE. My mother and father died in an automobile crash ten years ago, St. Christopher's vigil on the dashboard notwithstanding.

(JAYNE wipes her eyes.)

I'm really not like this... I may have to have my doctor up my hormone dosage. You come to me to tell me about these cataclysmic changes in your life and I'm babbling to you.

(MARY sips her drink and looks around.)

MARY. Mama had a miniature doghouse attached to the kitchen wall, and at the entrance to the doghouse were four miniature dogs, each one named for one of the children. When one of her children did something bad, she would put their dog in the doghouse. When daddy came home, he'd check the doghouse and if he found one of the dogs inside, he'd give that child a beating.

JAYNE. Do you want to put the Jayne dog in, Mary?

(MARY looks at her watch.)

MARY. It's almost two...

JAYNE. Do you have to be at work?

MARY. *(To herself:)* Three Demerols should...

(MARY draws her purse to her.)

JAYNE. I think you should have your baby. Your baby will be special. He will do great things. I just know it.

(JAYNE rises, walks over to the vacuum cleaner and unwraps the cord.)

MARY. It's only five percent of my life, he said. Ninety-five percent of me belongs to you.

JAYNE. Do you hate me, Mary? Took your husband. Cost you your baby.

(MARY nods.)

JAYNE. And then—and then *my* baby attacks you.

MARY. *(Softly to herself:)* He would have awakened by now...

JAYNE. I've destroyed your family, Mary. Yet you sit there so calmly.

MARY. *(Again softly:)* The Demerol will confuse him...

JAYNE. You should be screaming at me. You should be clawing at my eyes.

MARY. *(Again softly:)* He'd reach for me and his hand would be—
(Normal voice:) —wet with blood.

JAYNE. Blood?

(From her purse, MARY extracts a small Tupperware container. She holds the container out to JAYNE.)

MARY. Here.

JAYNE. What is it?

MARY. It's yours.

JAYNE. Mine?

MARY. Ninety-five percent belongs to me, why should I begrudge you five percent?

JAYNE. Mary—

(MARY thrusts out the container.)

MARY. Take it!

(JAYNE takes the container. She at first holds it at arm's length and then slowly brings it to her.)

Open it.

(JAYNE considers the container. She smiles briefly, almost unnoticeably.)

I loved him. I loved him.

JAYNE. You've made a horrible mistake.

MARY. Have I?

(JAYNE jiggles the container.)

JAYNE. John loves you too...deeply. That's why we broke it off. He couldn't go on seeing me while you were in his heart.

MARY. John told you that?

JAYNE. Oh, we had a terrible argument.

MARY. He didn't—

JAYNE. And now what have you done?

(JAYNE peels up the lid of the Tupperwear.)

Mutilated your husband?

(MARY grabs JAYNE's arm.)

MARY. No— No, it's only—

(JAYNE pulls off the lid and peers inside.)

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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