

A Refuge from Life
A Play by John Fisher

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Characters (In order of appearance):

SARMAN, fifty-five

PAUL, Sarman's Brother, early-fifties

ELIJAH, twenty-seven

PENNY, mid-fifties

SHROPSHIRE, mid-fifties

Location: New York, a condo in Chelsea, very grand

Time: 2009

Act One

Scene 1

(SARMAN sits in his living room, which has a front door that opens onto the building's thirtieth floor hallway. If a view is visible, it is spectacular, looking north and east. SARMAN's Chelsea condo is nice: classical details, books, orchids, Persian carpets, clean but worn. It has not seen a fresh coat of paint in a while and although it looks like it once knew impeccable upkeep, that time has passed. Still, SARMAN totters about getting it ready for company and it looks quite presentable. And it is, as New York condos go, spacious. Is he a little drunk? Probably. But this much booze, early in the evening, just makes him charming. Doorbell. SARMAN fluffs a pillow, sips some wine and goes to the door. What he finds there doesn't disappoint him so much as surprise him a bit, not whom he expected. It is PAUL, close in age to SARMAN – both in their fifties. PAUL is his brother. Well dressed, together, successful. SARMAN by contrast is dressed “fun” – punchy slacks, cardigan, silk shirt, loafers with tassels. PAUL holds a big bag of Zabar's.)

SARMAN

Hey.

PAUL

Hi. How are you?

SARMAN

Better. Better. Felling much better. Much better. A lot better. Goodness, someone sounds like they're still doing cocaine. (Calmly) I'm fine.

PAUL

Good. I have to pick up Sammy but I wanted to stop by, say hello, drop this off.

SARMAN

Yes, it's good. I'm good. All is good.

PAUL

You seem a little hyper.

SARMAN

“Seems, Madame, I know not seems.” I am hyper. I'm nervous. Big date.

PAUL

Really? Anybody I know? (Sitting.)

SARMAN

God, I hope not. And don't sit! I'm not going to be chaperoned by my little brother. Up! (PAUL stands, laughing.) Look at that pillow! Kissed by a straight boy's ass! (Manically fluffing it) It's hopeless. Hopeless!

PAUL

Did you meet him on-line?

SARMAN

The only people you meet on-line are prostitutes. He's someone from the old office. I went by there.

PAUL

Good, you took my advice.

SARMAN

Yes, I took a shower then took your advice. Went sniffing like a dog in heat for a job.

PAUL

That's what the world's doing right now. I get kids every day crashing our office, begging, begging for work-

SARMAN (Big yawn, then...)

I'm sorry, did I interrupt? I thought we were talking about me.

PAUL

Sorry, how did it go?

SARMAN

Well, the elevator door opened and there it was in front of me... a sea of adolescence, an ocean of ruddy cheeks and pimples, a tsunami of five year olds. I felt like I was walking into a nursery, rattles on the floor, teething rings at every desk, everyone working in a crib. But then I noticed, around the rim, the very edge of the room, in the distance, some old faces, my generation, people I'd known who'd managed to hang on, weather the reign of terror. And they smiled, stood up, approached: "My God, you're here, you're still with us." I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say a hush fell over the room. Very Norma Desmond – back on the set, the cadaver among the living. But they were all very sweet.

PAUL

And?

SARMAN

And I might do some consulting for them.

PAUL

Sarman!

SARMAN

Relax. Nothing's set.

PAUL

And you met someone.

SARMAN

Well, he was assigned to show me around the new Estée Lauder. He must have experience with the elderly.

PAUL

Huh. You could have given him the tour.

SARMAN

No. It's all different. All different. For the better. For the most part.

PAUL

I'd love to meet him.

SARMAN

No, no, absolutely not. I won't have you question him like a parent. It's a first date. Not really a date even. Just dinner, conversation, perhaps a sling, some rimming. Casual.

PAUL

Ok, ok. Well, I'm glad. What about the paint?

SARMAN

Oh, yes. Haven't gotten around to it.

PAUL

Would you like me to call?

SARMAN

No, I just haven't gotten around to it. Been busy.

PAUL

You'll call this week?

SARMAN

I might. It's no longer so urgent.

PAUL

Last week it was.

SARMAN

This week it isn't.

PAUL

Sarman.

SARMAN

Paul. I did what you said, I went on an interview, it went well. Let me worry about the paint.

(Buzzer.)

SARMAN

Ahhhh!!!! Out, out!

PAUL

Yes, yes.

SARMAN

Give my love to Sammy and... your wife.

PAUL

Victoria.

SARMAN

Yes, of course. I always get confused. There've been so many of them.

PAUL

Two. Give me a hug. (They hug.) I love you.

SARMAN

I love you too. (Buzzer. SARMAN picks up phone.) Hello, is this Carlton my doorman? (To PAUL) He still doesn't get it. (Into phone) Yes, Aziz. Yes, send him up, Aziz. No, Aziz, I still love you, I do. I know you're not a terrorist, Aziz. Send him up, Aziz. And don't you touch him, Aziz. (He hangs up.) Doormen in gay buildings these days.

PAUL

You haven't-

SARMAN

With Aziz? My dear, no. I couldn't afford him. Out! Vamanos! Allez! Raus!

PAUL

Ok, yes, I'm out of here. Bye.

(He leaves. SARMAN closes door behind him. He quickly downs his glass of wine and puts glass in kitchen sink. Doorbell rings. He opens door, maybe a bit too flamboyantly.)

SARMAN

Hey.

(ELIJAH enters. He is twenty-seven, dressed as if he just came from work: slacks, tie, sports coat. His look is sporty. He is handsome, cheerful, unassuming, but confident, a bit of a gym queen.)

ELIJAH

Hiya. Nice place.

SARMAN

Nice? Nice? Out! Out, let's try this again. Go.

(ELIJAH exits, SARMAN closes door.)

SARMAN

You all set?

ELIJAH (through door)

Yes.

(SARMAN opens door.)

SARMAN

Hello.

ELIJAH

Hiya. Wow! This place is great! Look at that view! Man! Jackpot! Disco!

SARMAN (modestly)

It's all right.

ELIJAH

You do this place yourself? Neeto! This place rocks! Biscuit! Soft melt!

SARMAN

Much better. You're hired.

ELIJAH

Waffle cone! Ha cha cha!

SARMAN

Thank you.

ELIJAH (sincerely)

That view. Wow.

SARMAN

I can keep an eye on all of Chelsea from up here. See, that little speck is Domenico, an ex. (He gasps at what he supposedly sees.) The slut! (ELIJAH laughs.)

ELIJAH

It's great. I'm in like a hovel. With three roommates.

SARMAN

Ugh, not for me, sister. My own digs, my own bed, my own life, except when someone special comes along, then I'll let them have a small corner of it. A sliver. (He hands ELIJAH a small mirror with something on it.) Do you do this?

ELIJAH

Ho, wow.

SARMAN

Go ahead. It's good. I went through Yale on that. When I met Sister Parish she was eighty-four and doing a line a day, right up the old blower. She could speed talk like a munchkin and recite her resume, which was Encyclopedia Britannic, month and year from 1914 to 1986 in a minute flat. Nice lady. A lady. Back when we had them. Now we just have bitches. Bitches and drag queens. And anatomic females. (ELIJAH hasn't sniffed.) Don't like your look in the mirror?

ELIJAH

I just don't do this. Sorry. Clean liver.

SARMAN

I'm surprised.

ELIJAH

So am I.

SARMAN

We all did this, all the time. At Estée.

ELIJAH

You weren't like this, this afternoon. You were calmer.

SARMAN

It's playtime.

(Throws on stereo. It is Angela Lansbury singing "Curtain up! Light the lights!")

ELIJAH

Hey, that's Patti Lupone's big number.

SARMAN

Bite your tongue! (Offering coke again) Do this! La Lansbury sounds better with a little of this.

ELIJAH

Nope. I have to get up early tomorrow.

SARMAN

I'll send you home with a doggy bag.

ELIJAH

No.

SARMAN

A drink?

ELIJAH

Maybe some Perrier.

SARMAN

My dear...

ELIJAH

I don't touch the stuff.

SARMAN

AA? NA? SAA?

ELIJAH

SAA?

SARMAN

Sex.

ELIJAH

Oh, no, I do sex.

(They laugh. Doorbell.)

SARMAN

Un moment. (He opens the door. PAUL is there.) Hey.

PAUL
Hi. I think I left something. Where is it?

SARMAN
Paul, this is Elijah. Elijah, Paul.

PAUL
Hi, Elijah,

ELIJAH
Hey, Paul.

SARMAN
Brother.

ELIJAH
Oh, ok. Good to meet you.

SARMAN
He thought you were my ex.

ELIJAH
No, I didn't.

PAUL
Just a joke. He always introduces people as his ex.

ELIJAH
Oh.

PAUL
Can't find it.

SARMAN
Damn it.

PAUL
Elijah. Would you excuse us a minute? I have to quickly talk to Sarman about something.
Family shit. You know.

ELIJAH
Sure, I'll go downstairs. One of my favorite bakeries is on the corner.

SARMAN
The pornographic one?

ELIJAH

No. What?

SARMAN

Pornographic Bakery. Dildo cakes. Sack muffins. Butt loafs. Fun!

ELIJAH

I'll be back.

SARMAN

Not too soon. I have a feeling I'm in trouble.

(ELIJAH leaves.)

SARMAN

Yes, Paul. Do you need to borrow money?

PAUL

Do you think this is a good idea?

SARMAN

Loaning you money? I have no problem with it.

PAUL

I saw him when I was leaving. I couldn't believe it.

SARMAN

Adorable isn't he?

PAUL

He's all right.

SARMAN

He's scrumptious.

PAUL

Sarman.

SARMAN

Paul.

PAUL

I wish you'd at least call the painters. Make a date.

SARMAN

Maybe I've changed my mind.

PAUL

I told you, it's not necessarily about selling, it's about painting, that's all. This place could use fresh paint.

SARMAN

So I can sell.

PAUL

Which would not be a bad idea if that's what you decide to do.

SARMAN

I'm not living with Sammy and Nomi and Veronica.

PAUL

Victoria.

SARMAN

In Queens? I've spent my life in queens, but not the city. I don't even know where it is.

PAUL

He might not come back, you know.

SARMAN

He has to come back. He left his coat. I'm not stupid.

PAUL

The way you're acting, I wouldn't come back.

SARMAN

I didn't want you to.

PAUL

I'd like you to get this place painted. I said I'd pay for it and it's a step I want you to take. We can talk about next steps when the place is painted.

SARMAN

You couldn't afford to have it properly painted. It's painted now. A new paint job would ruin it.

PAUL

It was painted ten years ago.

SARMAN

Fourteen coats. This is fourteen coats. You're going to cover that with two? It's a desecration.

PAUL

Ok I'm leaving. I thought we were making progress but...

SARMAN

Progress? Progress. What are you? My therapist?

PAUL

You won't see your therapist.

SARMAN

I can't afford my therapist.

PAUL

Dad can.

SARMAN

Seeing a therapist your dad pays for is sick. At fifty-five, it's downright disturbed.

PAUL

Ok.

SARMAN (flippantly)

Bye, love to the kids.

PAUL

Sarman, that boy is too young.

SARMAN

Same age as Vivica.

PAUL

Victoria is thirty-five.

SARMAN

And you can afford her.

PAUL

He's much too young. I know you don't want to hear that and judging from your state you probably can't hear it but he is too young.

SARMAN

None of your business, handsome.

PAUL (peeling off some bills)

Here's some money. Don't give it back. I don't want you pulling out those credit cards in some four star restaurant. They'll just get you in trouble.

SARMAN (taking money)

Ok. Thanks.

PAUL

Call me tomorrow. Would you?

SARMAN

Yes. I'll call you. In the morning, before I head out. To look for a job.

PAUL

Don't worry about that. Just have a good time tonight. Try to.

SARMAN

He's too young, I know it.

PAUL

You can still have a nice time. Just listen to him. Ask him some questions and listen. Ok?

SARMAN

I love you.

PAUL

I love you too.

(They embrace, kiss on the cheeks. PAUL leaves. SARMAN pulls out phone, dials.)

SARMAN

Hello. This is Phil Means. We had discussed a paint job on my place. I'd like to go ahead with it. Tomorrow? Wow, you out of work too? How 'bout next Tuesday. Well, anytime after nine. Ten. Eleven. Not before noon. No, it's good you can come. I'd like to do it quickly because... because I'm putting it on the market. Thank you.

(He hangs up. Puts away cocaine and wine bottle. He pours a Perrier. Pours another. And then he sits, with forced calm. Doorbell. He opens the door.)

SARMAN

Hi.

ELIJAH (entering holding a bakery box)

Hi. I found that bakery.

SARMAN

That bakery?

ELIJAH

The pornographic bakery. I bought you a penis cake.

SARMAN

Oh, wow. I was just joking.

ELIJAH

I figured. But when I saw it I was so amused I went in and checked it out. I couldn't stop giggling.

SARMAN

That funny Iranian couple still run it?

ELIJAH

Yes. I got to talking to them. They gave me a discount on this cock cake.

SARMAN

You make friends fast.

ELIJAH

Well they said it was a day old, a little limp.

SARMAN

I think he's gay.

ELIJAH

Yes, what's her story?

SARMAN

Lesbian. In Jordan that's what's known as a queer marriage. I think she makes the breast brioches.

ELIJAH

And the vagina squares.

(They laugh. SARMAN opens the box.)

SARMAN

Oh, my goodness, it is a penis cake. Look at that. The red veins are wonderful.

ELIJAH

Quite tasteful actually.

SARMAN

Yes. I remember that about them. They make the most refined erections.

ELIJAH

It's so delicately detailed. And well frosted.

SARMAN

I used to take these into the office, your office. And people would admire the craftsmanship.

ELIJAH

I'm really quite impressed. Look at the foreskin.

SARMAN

Yes. Obviously not a Jewish bakery.

ELIJAH

She warned me to be careful how you cut it.

SARMAN

Very well done. Well, let's put it here for when we come home for dessert.

ELIJAH

It's just a joke. We don't have to eat it.

SARMAN

Oh, no, you should always eat scrotum when it's offered to you.

ELIJAH

I always enjoy a late night sack.

(They both laugh. It gets quiet.)

SARMAN

Ah, first awkward pause. Sorry.

ELIJAH

Don't be sorry.

SARMAN

I tend to talk too much, when I'm nervous.

ELIJAH

Why are you nervous?

SARMAN

Well. I meant to invite you over on a date but I'm not sure I made it sound that way. At the office.

ELIJAH

You didn't make it sound any way.

SARMAN

I just had such a nice time with you this afternoon. Seemed silly to let it go.

ELIJAH

I felt the same. I'm glad you invited me.

SARMAN

I was shocked you accepted.

ELIJAH

Well, I don't always have plans. It's nice to meet new people. Hang out. My roommates are always home, they won't miss me.

SARMAN

You don't go out a lot?

ELIJAH

No, not that much. The city's expensive.

SARMAN

Still, it's there, to be enjoyed. You *must* enjoy it.

ELIJAH

I think it's there for people with expense accounts.

SARMAN

It's changed. It used to be cheap for people in the know: standing room at all the theatres, sneak into second acts for free, and the opera had cheap seats. Now it all costs. It's ruthless. There I go, chattering again.

ELIJAH

I go out when Shropshire takes us.

SARMAN

Is that really his name?

ELIJAH

Is Phil Means really yours?

SARMAN

(He laughs.) It's Philip Means. (They laugh.) No. It's Sarman. Sarman Heines.

ELIJAH

Pleased to meet you, Sarman Heines.

SARMAN

Well I'm glad you get out sometimes.

ELIJAH

With Shropshire. We're like his harem. Me and Saffron. When the three of us go out we paint the town. We go everywhere: Beatrice Inn, Death and Company, Schiller's Liquor Lounge. Sometimes all night. And he gives us the next day off. Says it's client development and I guess it is.

SARMAN

God, it sounds like the old days. I used to do that. Lots of client development.

ELIJAH

You must still.

SARMAN

No, not so much.

ELIJAH

Why not?

SARMAN

My dear, I haven't worked for three years. And before that I was two years at Macy's as a buyer, not terribly glamorous.

ELIJAH

Wow, so it's-

SARMAN

Five years since I was at Estée. Yes, I acted like it was only yesterday.

ELIJAH

Must be nice to have freedom.

SARMAN

We all thought that the first month of unemployment. But then we were just unemployed. I'm actually looking for work. That's why I came by today. Trolling.

ELIJAH

Estée's laying people off. Like everyone.

SARMAN

I didn't say I was good at looking for work. For me it's all I can do to walk through the door.

ELIJAH

Sorry.

SARMAN

Nothing to be sorry about. I'm just a little desperate. Like Anne Frank. (He smiles.) Boy, that was funny. Still, I amuse myself, do things I actually want to do. As opposed to things I feel I should do, to make connections.

ELIJAH

Go to museums, see plays you're actually interested in?

SARMAN

Yes, exactly.

ELIJAH

I wish I could do that stuff. I've been in New York three years and I've only seen musicals with stars in them. Shropshire usually drags us out at intermission. He gets bored easily.

SARMAN

Well, now. I was going to take you to dinner at Odeon, which I can't afford, but why don't we do something I can't afford that you would actually like. What show would you like to see tonight? Tell me.

ELIJAH

Oh, no, now, I wasn't fishing.

SARMAN (leafing through the *Times*)

No, let's do it. Let's see a show with no stars and no songs. *Red Hook Reminiscences?* *Lunch at Half Past Two?* We could go to the opera. See the scandalous *Tosca*. They say it's worth it just for the booing. The audience is always in good voice even if the singers aren't.

ELIJAH

Ok, whatever will take us.

SARMAN (getting his laptop)

It's not a club. There's no rope. The best thing about theatre is they'll take you no matter how you're dressed or what you look like. Thus all the tourists. Penny, my dear friend

Penny and I are members of all these cheap ticket offers: TDF, Goldstar, theatresucks.com.

ELIJAH

Theatresucks.com?

SARMAN

Oh, they hate everything so they print up phony tickets and sell them for pennies to try to crash the theatre industry.

ELIJAH

What?

SARMAN

Yeah, it's all underwritten by the CIA or Cheryl Crow or something. It's an effort to dumb down America so they can get another Bush elected.

ELIJAH

I don't believe you.

SARMAN

You shouldn't. I just make shit up all the time. Fenwick, my dear friend Fenwick, always says, "You do like to waffle on, don't you?"

ELIJAH

Girl friend?

SARMAN

Well a boy friend who became a girl friend, you know how that is.

ELIJAH

Tranny?

SARMAN

No. We went from being lovers to being friends. Boyfriend to girlfriend.

ELIJAH

MTF?

SARMAN

No.

ELIJAH

FTM?

No. SARMAN

He started using feminine pronouns? ELIJAH

Never mind. SARMAN

What are you doing? ELIJAH

SARMAN
Oh, I go on Craigslist and ask for cheapo last minute tickets. There's usually someone out there getting desperate, has something. Then you just have to race to their house to pick them up. If you're willing to spend forty dollars going cross town in a cab you can usually save thirty bucks. Oh, look! 2 tix for *Out of the Sky* at the Belasco.

What's that? ELIJAH

SARMAN
It's a play, from London. It must be good, it's by an Englishman. You know, it's one of those things where all the actors come from PBS. Should I get 'em?

Sure, why not? ELIJAH

SARMAN
Oh, my goodness. It's someone right in this neighborhood. We can walk there. (Typing) "Ok, here we come." Get your coat. (He slams shut his laptop and starts donning his elaborately flamboyant evening outfit – time of year: late-fall.)

What about dinner? ELIJAH

We'll go to Gray's Papaya. SARMAN

Gray's Papaya! ELIJAH

Sure, they got their permit back. You all set? SARMAN

ELIJAH

You going to wear that?

SARMAN

What? Why?

ELIJAH

You look like my eccentric uncle.

SARMAN (indicating scarf)

This is Hermes.

ELIJAH

Perfect if you're the dowager empress of a small European country. Here. (He pulls things off of SARMAN and throws them on couch: scarf, hat, handkerchief in breast pocket, boutonniere, commemorative pin. Indicating glasses.) Do you need these?

SARMAN

Only to hide from the world.

ELIJAH

So Truman Capote, after he died. (He throws them away.)

SARMAN

I feel naked.

ELIJAH

You should. (Indicating his woolly gloves) What are these?

SARMAN

Gloves.

ELIJAH

They're very Chris McCandless.

SARMAN

I'm a designer.

ELIJAH

Who hasn't worked in five years. I'm at Estée *now*. Use your pockets. (SARMAN throws gloves away, puts his hands in pockets, manly.) There. Much better.

SARMAN

I don't look like Dick Chaney?

ELIJAH

No, you look nice. You look real. (ELIJAH smiles.) You all set?

SARMAN

One thing. (He kisses ELIJAH on the cheek.) You shouldn't leave the house without a kiss. (ELIJAH blushes.) You just undressed me for god's sake.

ELIJAH

We should split.

SARMAN

We should.

(They leave.)

Scene 2

(The apartment. Later that night. SARMAN and ELIJAH enter.)

SARMAN

Home sweet home!

ELIJAH

It's not even eleven. I told you the subway was faster.

SARMAN

Who knew? I thought you had to factor in an extra half hour for mugging.

ELIJAH

I've been mugged three times, it's always quick, they know people are busy.

SARMAN

Can I make you some tea?

ELIJAH

To go with my penis?

SARMAN

Uh....

ELIJAH

Cake. My penis cake.

SARMAN

Oh, yes, of course.

ELIJAH
What did they keep calling it tonight? In the play?

SARMAN
Willie.

ELIJAH
Yes, my Willie Cake.

SARMAN
Do you like Herbal or caffeine?

ELIJAH
Herbal. Have to get up early.

SARMAN
Oh, yes. You're a working stiff.

ELIJAH
That's the name of the cake.

SARMAN
I hope it doesn't squirt its filling. What time you get in?

ELIJAH
800 AM.

SARMAN
8! My word. I used to get in around 11.

ELIJAH
Maybe that's why you're out of a job.

SAMRAN
Maybe.

ELIJAH
Sorry.

SARMAN
No, I love bitchiness. Adore it. One of the things I hate most about this new economy is how nice you have to be to everyone. They could all be potential employers. My job coach said when you leave the house, you're on an interview, even if you're just popping down for milk. Anyone could be a future contact.

ELIJAH

You have a job coach?

SARMAN

Well, my best girl friend. Penny. Girl, girl friend. Anatomic girl friend. Now there's a drag name: Ana Tomic. Penny gives me advice. Even when I don't ask for it.

ELIJAH

Ok, we haven't talked about it.

SARMAN

The noise in the theatre?

ELIJAH

Yes! I didn't want to say anything, I thought you might think I was ungrateful.

SARMAN

It's like they're home watching TV.

ELIJAH

Could you believe that guy texting?

SARMAN

Could you believe that woman blowing her nose?

ELIJAH

For two hours.

SARMAN

I had no idea snot could be so uncooperative.

ELIJAH

It was like a mining operation.

SARMAN

I swear to God that guy from Masterpiece Theatre was giving her dirty looks from the stage.

ELIJAH

I thought that too.

SARMAN

At one point I thought he was going to throw her his handkerchief.

ELIJAH

Yes, he kept fingering it during his big speech.

SARMAN

He was sending her a signal.

ELIJAH

She did get quieter after that.

SARMAN

These British actors. The technique! The mastery! The command of the language!

ELIJAH

He was great.

SARMAN

Yes, so handsome. Even if his rug was on backwards.

ELIJAH

You think that was a rug?

SARMAN

Yes, very expensive but you could see it rise in the back, after the wife hit him.

ELIJAH

She probably does it deliberately.

SARMAN

These British actresses. Such command of the stage! The movement! The gesture!
(Handing him a slice of cake) Here you go.

ELIJAH

A testicle! Thank you.

SARMAN (sits with him on couch)

My first Broadway play was *Amadeus* with Ian McKellan. Long before he was Sir Ian or Grendel or Frodo or Piro or Magento or any of those things. He was really something else, live onstage. So handsome, having so much fun up there. You could tell. I saw it four times. At every show he gave such a glorious performance, even for the matinee audience from Canarsie. You know those tough old broads who, if they're the least bit bored or offended, start retaliating with their candy wrappers. He charmed the Depends off them. So English, so sexy in those satin breeches, such a man of the stage.

ELIJAH

The first Broadway show I saw was *Footloose*.

SARMAN

Ouch!

ELIJAH

Yeah. Then I saw *Urban Cowboy*.

SARMAN

Mary!

ELIJAH

Yeah, then my Mom came to town and I splurged and took her to Susan Stroman's *Music Man*.

SARMAN (low enthusiasm)

Njih.

ELIJAH

No, now you bite your tongue. The choreography was so beautiful, so much fun, I was crying, I was that grateful. I sat there wishing I was on stage but knowing I could never cut it. It was so bittersweet to watch, I think that's the definition of great art. You sit stunned by its unachievability. Weird word but you know what I mean.

SARMAN

That's me at the ballet. When the corps de ballet enters in *Swan Lake*. (French pronunciation) Increable.

ELIJAH

Maybe you'll take me.

SARMAN

I'd like that.

(SARMAN touches ELIJAH's thigh. ELIJAH doesn't resist. SARMAN sets down his cake and leans over, takes ELIJAH's chin in his hand and gives him a kiss. It is very tender, affectionate.)

ELIJAH

It's going to cost you three hundred bucks.

SARMAN

Do you take food stamps?

ELIJAH

Nope.

SARMAN

Blue Chip?

ELIJAH

I don't even know what those are.

SARMAN

Ugh, you're killing me.

ELIJAH

I'm serious.

SARMAN

They're things you lick. (He leans toward ELIJAH again.)

ELIJAH

No, I'm serious about the three hundred.

SARMAN

No, you're not.

ELIJAH

I am.

SARMAN

Are you telling me you're a professional?

ELIJAH

No, I'm an amateur. Professionals cost five hundred.

SARMAN

You could charge five hundred, easy.

ELIJAH

So I'm giving you the professional's discount.

SARMAN

I'm not paying for it.

ELIJAH

What's the problem? You don't like me?

SARMAN

You sound like a professional.

ELIJAH

You kiss like someone who's been around.

SARMAN

Not around professionals.

ELIJAH

You want me to do something different, I will. (SARMAN stands.) Are you all right?
(SARMAN crosses away.) Come on, come back here.

SARMAN

I don't know what to say.

ELIJAH

Sorry.

SARMAN

Wait a minute. Is this for real?

ELIJAH

You thought you were getting lucky?

SARMAN

I didn't know what I was getting. I took you to a play.

ELIJAH

Thanks. That was nice.

SARMAN

You came over here to make money?

ELIJAH

I came over here to have something to do. When it became something else I expected to be compensated.

SARMAN

So you were just going to eat some penis cake, sip some herbal tea and go home.

ELIJAH

Sure. For the price of the cake I got taken to dinner and a play. That's worth it. You're telling me you've never paid for sex.

SARMAN

Yes, a couple of times. From whores.

ELIJAH

I don't have any problem with that word.

SARMAN

I do.

ELIJAH

That's your business. Think what you want.

SARMAN

Do you need this money?

ELIJAH

Living in New York? On an Estée salary? Yeah, I need this money.

SARMAN

Are you even gay?

ELIJAH

Is this edging into a discussion of morality? Politics? Because that costs more. Way more. (Pause.) Yes, I'm gay as a matter of fact. Otherwise I wouldn't be able to do this.

SARMAN

Charge for sex?

ELIJAH

Have sex with a man. Look, um Sarman, I wish I could help you find a job, but I can't. I would like to be your friend but that's probably not really possible after this, no matter how it comes out. But, if it's a question of money, I understand.

SARMAN

You think I'm broke?

ELIJAH

You said you haven't worked in years.

SARMAN

I can afford to pay a trick.

ELIJAH

That sounds better than whore.

SARMAN

Do people get depressed when you make this announcement?

ELIJAH

Most people figure out what's going on, somewhat earlier in the evening.

SARMAN

Before they've spent a lot of money on you.

ELIJAH (standing)

You know what? Let's put it down to a big misunderstanding. That happens. It's probably best if I just go home.

SARMAN

Hold on. Please. I always do this. I uhhh... I had a lovely time tonight and frankly I did not mean to bring you back here for sex. I didn't. I was truly enjoying your company.

ELIJAH

I was enjoying yours.

SARMAN

And I figured it was a little too good to be true-

ELIJAH

Sarman, you don't have to go into detail-

SARMAN

Wait. Let me finish this. I knew I shouldn't do what I did but I did it anyway, and I suppose these are the consequences.

ELIJAH

These aren't consequences.

SARMAN

Well they feel like them. And, even though I still partake, I've at least learned this from NA and AA, member in bad... atrocious standing, I've learned to take responsibility. But, and this is the part I'm actually just making up as I go along...

ELIJAH

What's that?

SARMAN

Me paying you for sex. I don't see how that makes either of us feel any better.

ELIJAH

Ok?

SARMAN

I mean, and don't answer this, but do you really enjoy making money that way?

ELIJAH

Some people. Who do this. They like the sense of superiority.

SARMAN

Do you?

ELIJAH

I like the money.

SARMAN

What do you do with it?

ELIJAH

Pay my rent. Pay for food. Pay my college loan back. Buy cute clothes. I didn't come with any money. Parents put me through college, sort of, and then... that was it. It was either figure it out or figure it out. I'm not the first kid in New York to figure it out.

SARMAN

That's sad.

ELIJAH

Doesn't feel sad. Feels real. I'm just barely here. Barely. Home is Philadelphia. I can't afford to be generous.

(Pause. SARMAN just stares at him for a moment. Then he takes a deep breath.)

SARMAN

So, flying by the seat of my pants, and operating from a place of low funds and loneliness.

ELIJAH

You don't have to tell me all this.

SARMAN (snapping)

Can I finish? I'm sorry. That came out snappy-bitchy. May I please, if you would, complete this train of thought?

ELIJAH (smiling)

Go ahead.

SARMAN

Well, I was going to offer, instead of me paying you for sex, which is too depressing in too many different ways... I was going to offer... Would you be interested in... well...

ELIJAH

What?

SARMAN

Why don't you move in and live here with me.

ELIJAH

For sex?

SARMAN

For companionship. The sex... the sex, the sex, the sex. I don't care about the sex. Oh, Lord, of course I do. I'm obsessed with the sex and if you move in I'll probably pine for you and masturbate pitifully, pitifully to your image. Oh, who cares? I stopped having anxiety about masturbation years ago. It's safe and it's legal and it's flattering to the fantasy image, who on earth still cares? Who cares about masturbation!? If it wasn't a little messy I'm sure everyone would do it all the time in public.

ELIJAH

They do. Go to Brooklyn sometime.

SARMAN

Anyway. I wouldn't be paying any more rent if you lived here. And you'd be paying nothing so you'd have more money so...

ELIJAH

So I move out of my place, move in here, you grow to hate me, I'm out on the street.

SARMAN

Why would I grow to hate you?

ELIJAH

I bring men home.

SARMAN

That I would hate. But can you take someone home now?

ELIJAH

Not often.

SARMAN

You'd have to figure the "not oftens" out.

ELIJAH

I'd have no lease. I'd have nothing.

SARMAN

How hard was it to find the place you're living in now?

ELIJAH

Well, a two bedroom with four people, not that difficult.

SARMAN

So I'll draw up a contract, Paul's an attorney, saying you get two weeks notice. That way, if I grow to hate you, you'll have two weeks.

ELIJAH

Why are doing this?

SARMAN

My first impulse today: I want to see more of him, hang out with him. My second impulse: I want people to see me with him. My third: I want to fuck him. So the sex didn't win or place. There must be things more important to me than sex. At least with you.

(Pause.)

ELIJAH

I should split.

SARMAN

Yeah.

ELIJAH

We're leaving on better terms than before, right?

SARMAN

Oh... That... My God, that was surprising. How did you start doing that?

ELIJAH

Shropshire. He was always hitting on me, when he took us out. He was always hitting on me. So I called his bluff. And he gave me a hundred bucks. I did it for free, as a thank you I guess, I don't know, just to do. And he paid me a hundred bucks.

SARMAN

And you realized your market value.

ELIJAH

No, I was insulted. So I refused the next time. I said no and treated him like the pig he is. That was the only time we did it. After the hundred bucks he disgusted me. Cheapness I find a real turn off. But he introduced me to some people. I've done it a couple of times. Eight to be precise. He told me, when he hired me, he wouldn't pay me enough to live on, not in New York, but he'd put me in a position to make more money. I guess I knew what he meant, but I was so thrilled to get the job I didn't really think about it. Now I see.

SARMAN

You're lucky to have that job.

ELIJAH

I know it.

SARMAN

I would never pay you for sex. That would hurt me.

ELIJAH

I know. The people I have sex with... they're not so... they've stopped thinking that way. They think cost and effect. They know how much a boyfriend would cost and they figure I'm a savings in the long run. Like Zipcar. There when you need it.

SARMAN

All pumped up and ready to go.

ELIJAH

Yeah.

(They look at one another.)

ELIJAH

Thanks for a glorious evening. It was fun from beginning to end. Grey's Papaya was hysterical. Working at Estée you get such a grand idea of yourself you'd never go in a place like that.

SARMAN

Yes. They'll actually put your corndog in the smoothie if you ask them. Don't ask me how I know that.

(ELIJAH laughs.)

ELIJAH

You're fun.

SARMAN

Thank you. I've known that since I was five. I used to have my mother in stitches.

ELIJAH

I bet she told you you were cute all the time.

SARMAN

Once in while. Yes, constantly. (Pause.) Please stay. Decisions like this are tough to make unless someone asserts themselves. So I will. Stay. Do it. You can never be sure, with people. Ever. But stay tonight. We'll finish the penis, watch TV, whatever. There's

an extra bedroom in there. It's all yours. Take it for the night. If you like, you can come back tomorrow. If not...

ELIJAH

My better judgment...

SARMAN

Is from Philadelphia. Ignore it. Take the leap. It's just for the night.

ELIJAH

I don't have a toothbrush.

SARMAN

You can buy one on the corner. I'll let you pay for it. Just to prove I'm not going to keep you.

(Pause.)

ELIJAH

Do you need anything?

SARMAN

Companionship. Friendship. Someone to see when I walk through the door. Someone to have dinner with once in while. All the things I've lived without for so long and now so desperately need.

ELIJAH

I meant from the corner.

SARMAN

Oh. Yes. Milk. 2%.

ELIJAH

I like skim.

SARMAN

Then go home and drink skim.

ELIJAH

Bitch.

SARMAN

Wannabe whore.

ELIJAH

Broke John.

Estée prostitute. SARMAN

Unemployed chicken hawk. ELIJAH

Are you chicken? SARMAN

Well... ELIJAH

Old chicken. Pretty much rooster. SARMAN

Well, you're old hawk. ELIJAH

There's no such thing. Hawk is hawk, it doesn't get old. SARMAN

(They smile at one another. Lights fade.)

Scene 3

(Saturday morning. Later that week. We hear someone struggling to open the front door with a key, unsuccessfully. Occasionally they stop to swear, it is a woman's voice. "Hell!" More struggle. "Crap!" Struggle. "Fucker!" Struggle and the door suddenly bursts open bringing PENNY spilling into the room with the final outburst: "Low down urban underpass slut fucker!" PENNY is in her mid-fifties, roundish but not obese, attractive and fun looking. She is dressed in a fun winter outfit: scarf and muff, hat and woolly gloves. She walks about the room as if it were hers, which, in a way, it is. She is peeling off her various layers, setting down some shopping – a bag from Starbucks and cups in a carrier tray - getting comfortable.)

PENNY
Yoo-hoo. Party boy! Sarman! Rise and shine. Pen-Pen is here. Unntz! Unntz! Unntz!
Hope I didn't wake you. That key you gave me still doesn't work! Ugh! (She collapses on the sofa.) Sarman sweetie, I have all kinds of news. Come out here and kiss your Pennipulus.

(From the stage left bedroom ELIJAH enters. He is naked, scratching himself, obviously just woke up. They look at one another.)

Are you supposed to be here? ELIJAH

Are you? PENNY

Yes. ELIJAH

Yes. PENNY

(He crosses the room and exits to bathroom. We hear a thunder of pee in the bathroom, followed by a toilet flush. He enters again and crosses to her.)

I'm Elijah. ELIJAH

Penny. PENNY

Ah, the girl girlfriend. ELIJAH

Is Sarman dead? Did you kill him? PENNY

I don't think so. ELIJAH

You're a heavy drinker. PENNY

I'm trying to be. It's a deal I made. Sarman said he'd try to stop coke if I tried to start drinking. I have a strict regimen. SARMAN

Good. PENNY

Excuse me. ELIJAH

Aren't you going to stay here and keep me company? PENNY

ELIJAH

Ummm... actually, no. (He leaves.)

(She sits a moment.)

PENNY

Sarman! Sarman!

(SARMAN enters behind her, from the stage right bedroom.)

SARMAN

Penny.

PENNY (startled)

Oh, my God, you scared me. What are you doing over there?

SARMAN

Sleeping.

PENNY

But... Your friend is in there.

SARMAN

Oh, yes. Elijah.

PENNY

We met.

SARMAN

You did?

PENNY

I accused him of murdering you.

SARMAN

Sorry, I should have told you or left a note or something.

PENNY

So you two didn't...

SARMAN

Didn't what?

PENNY

Well, you're sleeping in separate bedrooms.

SARMAN

Uh-huh.

PENNY

That usually takes years to happen. My parents didn't get around to separate bedrooms till their twenty-fifth anniversary.

SARMAN

He doesn't sleep with me.

PENNY

Are you blind? He was built for sex.

SARMAN

Adorable, isn't he?

PENNY (looking around)

Is this a reality show?

SARMAN

He's my roommate.

PENNY

Oh, come on.

SARMAN

He is.

PENNY

What does he pay?

SARMAN

Nothing.

PENNY

Nothing?

SARMAN

Nada.

PENNY

Sarman, You can't afford this. You're supposed to be cutting back. This is out of your league. (He plops down. Rubs his eyes. Looks at her.) Well?

SARMAN

Penny, last week I took out another 25K from my 401k so I could live in this place for another two months. Is that my life? Sacrificing my ambivalent future to sustain a miserable present. Taking out loans I'll never pay back so I can sit around here alone and redecorate, with no money. He's staying as my guest, he has a good job, it's not costing me anything.

PENNY

And what's he to you?

SARMAN

My roommate. It's time I had one, for maturity's sake.

PENNY

You've never touched him.

PENNY

None of your business.

SARMAN

Sarman, have you had sex?

PENNY

No.

ELIJAH (off)

Hey. Can I come in now?

SARMAN

Of course.

ELIJAH (entering, wearing briefs)

I got tired of pretending I wasn't spying.

PENNY

Then don't spy.

ELIJAH

Well, I'm hungry.

PENNY

Is that all you're going to put on?

(SARMAN claps his hand over her mouth, muzzling her.)

SARMAN

You working today?

ELIJAH

I'm supposed to but...

SARMAN

If Shropshire doesn't come in you won't either.

ELIJAH

I'm in suspense till ten. If he's coming in it will be by then. Saffron will call me and give me the green light. If he shows up I've stepped out for coffee. I can be up there in twenty minutes. It's how we handle Saturdays.

PENNY

Saffron?

ELIJAH

Lipstick. You'd like her!

PENNY

I'm not a dyke!

(ELIJAH exits to kitchen mouthing "Yeah, right.")

SARMAN

That's not technically true.

PENNY

It is actually. It is *actually* true. I haven't actually had sex since the Clinton administration.

SARMAN

Theoretically, you're still a lesbian.

PENNY

I don't believe in theory. I believe in practice, which I'm out of. Anyway, we're talking about you. Let me explain a concept to you: a roommate pays for his room. It's how it's done.

SARMAN

He does pay for his room. It's just not here. His room is in a disgusting flat on Mott Street with three other climbers. So I'm helping out four people. I'm happier, he's happier, they have more space. I should apply for non-profit status. I think of myself as a social service.

PENNY

And every night you pine pitifully for his attentions and he basks in your puppy dog admiration.

SARMAN

Listen, you spent two years salivating for Miss Spike Heeled Corporate Brazier Buster Heidi Hooters.

PENNY

Hannah Hoosier. With one big difference. She paid me.

SARMAN

Kept you on slave wages because she knew you'd bitch for her on the wholly unreasonable hope that she'd have a few too many one night and let you muff dive her corporate lap.

PENNY

I hate that expression.

SARMAN

Crotch swim. Pussy crawl.

PENNY

Stop it.

SARMAN

Lap her corporate lap.

PENNY

He's using you.

SARMAN

No. It was entirely my idea.

PENNY

And it doesn't help your situation at all. If you had a roommate he'd help pay for this place.

SARMAN

Do you really see me trolling Craig's List for a suitable roommate? And then I'd have to spend the whole day maintaining this place, keeping my tenant happy, playing landlord. What would I get? Some sixty-something down on his luck who didn't want to be here.

PENNY

You'd get someone like you, someone struggling to piece it together. A real person.

SARMAN

I don't want a real person. I want me at twenty-five: striving, hoping, believing I can make it work and dreaming of the big time.

PENNY

You would never have lived this way at twenty-five.

SARMAN

I didn't need to. I came with a fat trust fund and connections up the wazoo. Four years at Penn, three at Yale, if I couldn't make my way I would have been damn stupid. And I didn't, in the end. Look at me.

PENNY

It's the economy, Sar. You know that.

SARMAN

Thank God for the economy, five years after my world fell apart the economy fell apart, God bless it, to finally give me an excuse. I was a flop in the bull market, Pen. We both know that.

PENNY

Well, if you were a flop I was a never started.

ELIJAH (off)

Can I come in?

PENNY

Beats listening at the door.

ELIJAH (entering)

Man you two are depressing.

PENNY

This is what people who pay for things do, sit around and talk about money, the economy...

ELIJAH

I pay rent.

PENNY

Not here.

ELIJAH

No, but I pay rent. It all works out in the end.

PENNY

Why don't you pay Sarman rent?

ELIJAH

We figured I could never afford this rent. So I pay the rent I can afford.

SARMAN

Anyway, soon he'll pay no rent.

ELIJAH

I can't wait. I'm officially moving out of Mott Street. My roommates will miss me. They'll miss missing me.

PENNY

So then you'll be a full-fledged free loader.

ELIJAH (pointedly, to her)

You know in my life, I spend all my time waiting for things to absorb. "Yes, you have to pay for it." "Yes, I live here and pay no rent." "Yes, I work like a dog for no money." People always absorb the new information, some quicker than others, but you have to wait. I'm patient.

PENNY

Isn't anybody going to ask about my life?

SARMAN

Ah, that's how we're being rude. You're right, how are you, honey? How was your week? What's new?

PENNY

My mother's dying.

SARMAN

I asked what's new.

PENNY

No, I think she's really going this time. Really. You know how I think she never is. Now I do. (SARMAN looks at her. There are tears in her eyes.)

SARMAN

Oh, Penny.

ELIJAH

Oh, Penny.

PENNY (to ELIJAH)

Oh, Penny? Don't "oh Penny" me. You just met me. Where do you get off "Oh, Penny?"

ELIJAH

My mother died last year. At fifty-five.

PENNY

I'm going to kill you. (Pause.) Sorry.

ELIJAH

That's ok. Anyway, I felt horrible. For six months.

PENNY

Is that what I have to look forward to?

ELIJAH

Probably worse. You knew her so much longer.

PENNY

I still want to kill you.

SARMAN

He doesn't know what he's saying, really.

ELIJAH

She was sick for a long time.

SARMAN

Rachel's been sick for a log time.

PENNY

It's terrible. She's gotten so used to being sick and not dying that I think she's even less prepared than if she'd never been sick a day in her life. She really doesn't believe it's going to happen. After years of saying, "It's coming! It's coming!" now she's saying, "Nah, we've been through all this before."

SARMAN

I'm sorry, baby.

ELIJAH

You really think this is it?

PENNY

Yeah, I do. (She cries. SARMAN holds her. ELIJAH rubs her back. She stops crying and looks at ELIJAH. He smiles. She decides it's all right and goes back to crying.)

SARMAN

Is she at home?

ELIJAH

Yes. We both are.

SARMAN

You're staying with her?

ELIJAH

Yes. Back in the old house. It's weird to sleep there. In my old room, where I fantasized about Billy Jean King and Martina Navratilova. It's weird and it's not, you know how it is.

SARMAN

Oh, baby. I'm sure that means a lot to her, having you there.

PENNY

It does. Oh, no. I hate these crying jags. It's awful. You know how much I love her. I can't imagine her not being there. It would be almost as bad as you not being there.

SARMAN

Sweetie.

ELIJAH (starting a long story)

My mommy was everything to me. And I couldn't be there. She was in Philadelphia and I had to stay here. For work.

PENNY

I'm sorry, umm... I just met you. This is a little weird.

ELIJAH

Please listen. (He holds her hand.) When she died. I mean after she was dead. About a week later. I was in a fancy restaurant. La Goulue to be exact, with Shropshire. And I saw, I saw this woman who reminded me so much of her, when she dressed up. She had on this gorgeous Givenchy gown and pearls and her hair was marcelled, very proper, very refined, and very uptight, just like mom. And I knew, I knew I shouldn't do it, but I walked up to her, I walked right up to her table, and I said, "I'm sorry to disturb your lunch ladies, but you remind me so much of my mother and she just died and I just had to say that. She was a very beautiful woman and a wonderful mother. And I wanted to tell you that." And she looked at me, for only the briefest moment was she put out by my approaching her, but I guess she decided it was La Goulue, I must be ok, the maitre d' had seated me. She took my hand and she said, "I'm sure she loved you very much. I have two children, a girl and a boy, and I can't even imagine my life without them." And I said, "Thank you." And then, and this blew me away, I mean she was like one of those Park Avenue women you thought would never even speak to a stranger, let alone touch

one. She stood up and gave me a hug and I could tell she imagined she was hugging her son. I could feel her strength. Like she didn't want to let me go. Like she was trying somehow to absorb me, protect me from the world. And I hugged her back, not too hard, I didn't want to scare her. And then we just smiled at one another and parted. And the point of that long boring story is: grief is universal. It's available. People understand. I know we just met Penny but I feel bad. That's one of the nice things about humans, their humanity.

(PENNY takes his hand.)

PENNY

Who was the woman?

SARMAN (excited)

Yeah tell us.

(ELIJAH sighs.)

ELIJAH

That's not the point of the story.

PENNY

I know, but tell us.

SARMAN

Yes.

ELIJAH

A woman I'd never seen before.

SARMAN

Nancy Kissinger.

ELIJAH

No, not Nancy Kissinger.

PENNY

Mercedes Bass.

SARMAN

Ann Bass.

PENNY

Christine Schwartzman.

Jackie O! SARMAN

It couldn't be, she's long dead. PENNY

Never mind. ELIJAH

Who was it? SARMAN

Come on. PENNY

La Goulue, come on. SARMAN

I told you, I'd never seen her before. ELIJAH

Yeah, but she was someone. PENNY

Shropshire knew. SARMAN

He told you when you got back to the table. He said, "My God, you know who just felt you up?" PENNY

Huhhh... I know this is a long shot. SARMAN

What? PENNY

You'd be blessed to touch this person and there is no way this is possible. SARMAN

What? PENNY

No way in the world. Impossible. Susan Gutfreund. SARMAN

(PENNY and SARMAN are leaning forward in anticipation.)

ELIJAH

No.

(They both slump.)

ELIJAH

Betsy Bloomingdale.

(They both scream and dance about. Then they lose their energy.)

PENNY

Betsy Bloomingdale?

ELIJAH

Yeah.

PENNY

Oh. That's not all that great.

SARMAN

Yeah, she looks like someone who would do that.

PENNY

Yeah.

ELIJAH

Sorry.

PENNY

Oh, no, it's great. We're so happy she was there for you.

SARMAN

Yeah, she's a wonderful woman. Big celebrity. She has all those Van Goghs.

ELIJAH

That's not the point of the story.

PENNY

Yes, yes, yes, we got the point of the story. "No man is an island." "We are the world."
Fascinating.

ELIJAH

You're kinda a bitch aren't ya?

PENNY

Don't be a sourpuss. I feel closer to you. You've opened up. Being a bitch is a sign of affection for me.

SARMAN

It's like butt sniffing, her bitchiness.

PENNY (to ELIJAH)

You're adorable. But back to me. So... I've finally come to the conclusion that it's time to grow up.

SARMAN

Ok.

PENNY

So... Unable to afford two houses, my Mom's and my closet sized apartment on the Upper West Side, I've decided to move home.

SARMAN

What? Why?

PENNY

I have to. The house is mine and I can't sell it. Not in this market. And, without a job, I can't maintain two places. So....

SARMAN

You're moving back to Nutley? You'll die.

PENNY

I won't. I'll worse than die. I'll pass. For one of them. It's true. I looked around the Nutley Mall last Saturday, when I took mom's car to go there and get away from pills and tubes and the paraphernalia of her demise... I went to the mall and realized, with a slight change of wardrobe, that I will pass. For them. I am them.

SARMAN

Penny.

PENNY

No, I'm a post sex middle-aged American female.

SARMAN

You're not post sex. You had sex with your ex. Margie.

PENNY

Last year. And that was an accident.

ELIJAH

How do you have accidental sex?

PENNY

It's complicated. No, I've made up my mind. I'm leaving New York. I've held my breath long enough, it's the right thing to do. I mean look at my life. I clip coupons and go to movies. I can do that in Nutley

SARMAN

What about your love life?

PENNY

Stagnant. There's got to be this much action in Nutley.

SARMAN

What about me?

PENNY (takes his hand)

That's the roughest thing. I'm sorry, sweetie.

(Phone rings. ELIJAH grabs it.)

ELIJAH (into phone)

Ok, yes. (He hangs up.) I'm on. Shropshire just walked in. Later. It was nice to meet you. (He bounds out of the room.)

SARMAN

God.

PENNY

Sweetie.

SARMAN

You're pretty much the only person left in this city I can hang with. I have no one, no one else.

PENNY

Sarman.

SARMAN

There are Saturdays where we've gone to four movies, Penny. Four. You're my favorite time killer. I can't... I don't know how I'll manage.

PENNY

You will.

SARMAN

You can't leave.

PENNY

I have to. It's economics, Sar. It's long overdue. I have to take the chance while it presents itself. It's a good thing. Nutley's not far. I'll have mom's car, I'll come into town.

SARMAN

People never do that. They get settled. They come in once a week, then once a month, then not at all. You know that.

PENNY

Yeah.

SARMAN

Jesus.

PENNY

Sar.

SARMAN

Well, this is a blow.

PENNY

I thought you might be this way.

SARMAN

Well, why wouldn't I be?

PENNY

I know. It's upsetting to me too but I have to do it. Read the paper. We all, all of us, have to cut back. It's not between the lines any more. It's right there. It's terrible but we have to.

SARMAN

Wish I could, but I can't.

PENNY

Sar, I've been thinking...

SARMAN

What?

PENNY

Well, maybe you should come with me. Come live with me.

SARMAN

In Nutley?

PENNY

Why not?

SARMAN

Don't be an ass.

PENNY

Sar.

SARMAN

Not on your life.

PENNY

Sar, now listen. I would love to have you, love to. It's a huge house and it wouldn't even be like we share a space, but I would love to share a space. Would love to. And we'd be together. Sar. I feel like we found each other, you and me. And yes we couldn't be more unmatched but we are, we are matched. I don't care about the sex and cruising anymore, I don't. And you, well you could come into town if you wanted. Or whatever.

SARMAN

Or whatever? What's "or whatever?" You and me could pass for married? We'd be Ward and June, maybe adopt some kids and all be one big happy family.

PENNY

No, that's not what I meant.

SARMAN

I can't go back in the closet, Pen. I've been out of it longer than in.

PENNY

Sar, don't be ridiculous. Nutley is thirty minutes from town, it's not the edge of civilization. There are queers all over the place.

SARMAN

"The fag and dyke next door, they are so nice. And they've dolled that Herker house up beautifully. It's so Sappho Chic. I hope our daughter is gay, I hope they convert all the kids on this block. That's what I want our kids to be, unemployed gays with no money waiting around for us to die so they can infiltrate the suburbs."

PENNY

Stop it. That's hateful.

SARMAN

Why don't you move in here? You can live with me. (Pause.) I'm serious.

PENNY

What about Wonderboy?

SARMAN

I'll toss him out, I can do it today, he still has his old place. I only took him in for company, you can be my company, you already are.

PENNY

No, Sarman.

SARMAN

Why not? We'd have fun. Just more of it.

PENNY

I don't want to. I don't like this neighborhood, Sarman. It's all-gay all the time, it's a gay ghetto. If you're young and have a lot of money and are well connected it's great, it's the place to be. If you're not, and I certainly am not, it's the worst place.

SARMAN

I'm none of those things.

PENNY

I know that, Sarman. I've never thought it was a good place for you.

SARMAN

This is where I live.

PENNY

It's where you moved when you were ambitious and had a lot of money.

SARMAN

I'm still ambitious.

PENNY

Sarman, you spend whole days with me doing free things, paying for one movie and sneaking into three, going to the Met and cadging a button, free days at the Whitney, galleries... Sarman, you changed your life, you spend almost nothing, you've cut back. Except this place. This ten thousand a month shibboleth which you can't afford.

SARMAN

You could sell that house, move in, pick up some of the rent.

PENNY

Paul told me he wants you to sell this place. That's why you're having it painted, to put on the market.

SARMAN

That's Paul's idea, not mine.

PENNY

It's the only idea, Sarman.

SARMAN

And go live with my father in Milwaukee or a garage in Queens.

PENNY

No, live with me. I need you Sarman, I do. I have for a long time. This place, it belongs to the next round of Sarmans, give them a chance. There's one out there with a load of money just waiting to give it to you, make you cozy again.

SARMAN

God, it's all about money. Money, money, money.

PENNY

It is Sarman, until it's not. When it's not, when you have enough, you can relax and enjoy life. Instead of living in fear.

(During the following SARMAN is mixing himself a drink.)

SARMAN

You make us sound like the Franks, cowering in an attic.

PENNY

That's how I feel in this city. Like they're coming to get me.

SARMAN

The Nazis are not coming to get you, Penny, not in New York City.

PENNY

No, my credit card is, and the bank, and the IRS and everyone else who wants a piece of this island of wealth. I feel stalked. I want out. The new economy is supposed to be easing up on people but it's stalking them. My cards are increasing their APRs, you can't renegotiate anything, our landlord doubled the rent increase this year, doubled. No one, absolutely no one is hiring, it feels like the end of the world, Sarman. It does. (She looks at him about to sip his drink.)

SARMAN

I need a drink.

PENNY

At ten-thirty.

SARMAN

It's better than a snort. Or a meeting. (He drinks. She stares at him.)

(ELIJAH bounds on dressed. He grabs the bag of Starbuck's)

ELIJAH

Ok, can I take these? It will save me having to stop on the way for props.

PENNY

Of course.

ELIJAH

How do I look?

PENNY

Like you've been at work since eight and popped out for Starbuck's.

ELIJAH

Good. He'll probably take one look at me and send me home. He can be very benevolent on Saturdays. It's his way of showing me he got laid.

SARMAN

Are you coming straight home? (Pause.) I'd like to know

ELIJAH

You never ask me that.

SARMAN

Please let me know.

ELIJAH

I guess. Yeah. I'll be home by 530. Maybe sooner.

SARMAN

Good.

ELIJAH

Nice to meet you.

PENNY

It was nice to meet you. I think this arrangement is very strange and probably slightly criminal but you're nice enough so I approve.

ELIJAH

Oh, thank God, I was so worried. Later.

(ELIJAH bounds out the door.)

SARMAN

What would you like to do today? There's the Corot show at the Met or a new Smithsonian show at Castelli or we could take a walk on the Highline.

PENNY

Sarman-

SARMAN

Penny, I've done a pretty shitty job of figuring out my life up to this point –

PENNY

You haven't done-

SARMAN

No, I have, I know that. But I have figured it out. This is it, this is my life. This is, for me, the minimum. If something doesn't come through to make this... sustainable, isn't that the word we look for now, sustainable? If something doesn't come through to make this sustainable then I'll have to become extinct. And something will happen, Penny. Estée will come through with a new job, I'll go back to Macy's, the phone will ring and something will happen. I've been through all this before. I know.

PENNY

I know you do. (She smiles.)

(We hear a key in the door.)

SARMAN

That'll be Paul. Excuse me, while I avoid him and get dressed.

(He exits. We hear the key in the door, the same struggle, this time PAUL's voice. "Shit." "Motherfucker." "Motherfucking shit!" Door bursts open revealing PAUL holding a huge bag from Zabar's.)

PAUL

Care package!

PENNY

Paul. You rat. How are you?

PAUL

Struggling. Like everyone, Penny. Right now with this door. I swear he deliberately gave me a key that doesn't work.

PENNY

My own little Bernie Madoff. Shafted any more desperate lesbians lately?

PAUL

Those were high-risk investments, Penny. I told you that.

PENNY

Yes, you did. But they were no-risk investments because nothing was ever invested.

PAUL

Penny, you can't prove that.

PENNY

Which is a non-denial denial.

PAUL

I thought you came at noon.

PENNY

I figured on traffic, there was none. So I'm early.

PAUL

Traffic?

PENNY

Yes, Bernie. Traffic. I own a house now, and a car. I'm a commuter.

PAUL

Congratulations.

PENNY

You don't believe me. My mother's dying. She's leaving me everything. Bought and paid for. No mortgage.

PAUL

Wow. Well congratulations. That's great.

PENNY

Thank you.

PAUL

I wanted to tell you that there's still hope for those securities. I was going to contact you next week, when I think I'll have some good news

PENNY

I look forward to your call.

SARMAN (entering)

Hey.

PAUL

Hi. This place smells different.

PENNY

Subtle, Paul.

PAUL (holds her affectionately)

No, not you, sweetie. I know your smell. It smells like...

SARMAN

Estée for Men? That's Elijah.

PAUL

Elijah?

SARMAN

You met him. On Tuesday. He's at work now.

(PAUL realizes what SARMAN's saying. Big grin.)

PAUL

Wow, Sarman, way to go.

SARMAN

It's not what you think.

PAUL

Well I don't think you're paying for it cause I know you can't afford it. Good work, man. I brought you bagels, lox, hamantashen, soup, a feast.

SARMAN

Thank you.

PAUL

Thank Victoria.

Who's Victoria?
PENNY

My wife.
PAUL

Ah, yes.
PENNY

I made the appointment. (SARMEN looks confused.) For the assessment.
PAUL

Why did you do that?
SARMAN

It was no trouble. Just a phone call. They'll be here on Friday.
PAUL

Paul.
SARMAN

No, don't worry about it.
PAUL

You're not selling this place.
SARMAN

Sarman, I own half of it at this point, with those loans I floated you. I do have a right, a legal right, to reassess it. As a piece of property. I gotta run, Sammy finishes soccer practice at noon. I'll call you this week, Penny. I'm happy about the house. Oh, and sorry about your mother.
PAUL

(PAUL leaves.)

Your brother's a shit, Sarman.
PENNY

No, he's right. It is almost his to sell at this point.
SARMAN

That's not what I was referring to. I dropped a hint about my new found wealth and he started in again about my portfolio.
PENNY

SARMAN

Don't give him any more money, Penny.

PENNY

I was just trying to suss him out. He hasn't changed.

SARMAN

He's a survivor.

PENNY

God that mentality pisses me off

SARMAN

Go freshen up. We can check out the High Line and look at the butterflies. It's almost winter, Penny. I'd like to see the butterflies. One last time.

(She exits. He quickly prepares a line of cocaine and snorts it, rubbing the residue on his teeth. She enters in time to see this last move. He turns to her, knowing he was caught but acting like he got away with it, and smiles. Blackout.)

Scene 4

(SARMAN, PENNY and ELIJAH sit on the sofa. It is late at night, two months later, and they are talking after dinner. The walls are the same color but they pop having obviously enjoyed a new gloss. The place looks much better, tidier. It too pops.)

PENNY

Oh, it's hysterical. They're all so nice to me all the time, since mama died. Solicitous and kind: "Oh honey, we are just so glad you're staying here. We miss your mama so much."

SARMAN

Don't trust them. You're out in the Wilderness of New Jersey. There are sects.

PENNY

No, listen, Mrs. Walbisch, the neighbor two doors down, she brought me a casserole the morning after the funeral. She said, "We heard that nice anchor lady on WOR has a woman friend she's lived with for twenty years and we just couldn't like her any more than if she was our own daughter. She reads those headlines with such assurance. We just love her to death."

ELIJAH

They know?

PENNY

All these years, I guess mama was going up and down the block shouting, “My daughter’s a lesbian! My daughter’s a lesbian!”

SARMAN

And here I was afraid you’d be dragged into the town square and branded L.

PENNY

This guy from the Salvation Army came by to pick up a load of stuff and he wants me to meet his sister who teaches at the local high school, says she’s perfect for me.

ELIJAH

Wait! Wait! Wait! Gym instructor!

PENNY

No. Shop! And Drivers’ Ed!

SARMAN

Oh, my Lord!

PENNY

It’s great. Mom’s oldest friend in the world Felicia came by and said when she was in college at Mount Holyoke, she had a liaison with a society girl and it went on for six months. “A liaison.”

SARMAN

They are coming to you as to shrine.

PENNY

Oh, yeah, the place is crawling with ladies that way.

ELIJAH

What about guys?

PENNY

I’m afraid you were right about that. Not so many gay boys. Couple of super grand queens who own an old estate that looks like Xanadu, high powered attorneys or something, but a definite lack of upper middle classers in my neck of the woods. Felicia said she would never have a problem with her Lizzie turning Lezzie, she wouldn’t. But if her beautiful son Macklin came out of the closet she’d disown him and move to Israel.

ELIJAH

Is she Jewish?

PENNY

No, but she'd go there as self-punishment. She'd move to Gaza and pray for a missile to land on her. She doesn't believe in suicide. (Pause.) And Margie came out to visit. (To ELIJAH) My ex.

SARMAN

No!

PENNY

Yes.

ELIJAH

What happened?

PENNY

Oh, no, it's boring.

SARMAN

No, tell us!

SARMAN/ELIJAH

Tell us, tell us, tell us.

PENNY

No, no, no. But I'll show you.

SARMAN

What?

PENNY

Yes, it's much better shown than told. (To ELIJAH) Come here. Sit beside me. Ok, you're me.

ELIJAH

I'm you?

PENNY

You're me. Now-

(ELIJAH starts posing like a real butch: legs spread, hands on knees, chest out, tough expression.)

PENNY

No way am I that butch.

ELIJAH
You are.

PENNY
Am not.

ELIJAH
You have to understand that gay men see you that way.

PENNY
Oh, you do? Well this is how a lesbian sees you. (She sits with knees crossed demurely gesturing like a queen and exploring, with concern, a supposed bald spot on her crown.)

ELIJAH
I do not explore my bald spot.

SARMAN
He doesn't have a bald spot.

PENNY
He does and you do.

ELIJAH
No way. (To SARMAN) No way, right?

SARMAN (exploring ELIJAH's crown)
Well, wait a minute. Oh. My goodness.

(ELIJAH dashes out of the room and returns from the bathroom with two mirrors that he maneuvers to check out his crown.)

ELIJAH
That's a part. It's not a bald spot.

PENNY
It's a pretty wide part.

ELIJAH
Potential bald spot. Maybe.

PENNY
The Grand Canyon started as a creek.

(He sets the mirrors down and touches his spot. Now self-conscious, he will do this throughout the rest of the scene.)

SARMAN

I want to hear about ex-Margie's visit.

PENNY

Ok, El, come here and sit. Now you just be me and tell a boring story about shopping or driving or something.

ELIJAH

Like you do.

PENNY

Watch it. Just try to make it interesting but keep going. And I'll be Margie.

ELIJAH

Well, what do I miss most about New York? The pigeons. I mean when you live in the suburbs you're either in your house or in your car, you don't get that daily contact with winged disease. Oh, we have seagulls with trash in their beaks flying from the dump and hawks clutching kittens from the local SPCA, but there's nothing like a pigeon. You want me to keep going?

PENNY

So this was the two of us. She was all quiet, I was being a chatterbox. Then this is what happened. Keep going.

ELIJAH

Why I was driving into town today and was it the Empire State Building that excited me? No. Was it the site of the Washington Bridge? No. It was the-

(Suddenly PENNY jumps on top of him and starts kissing his lips madly, she has really bowled him over on the couch. After a few seconds she sits back demurely like nothing happened. ELIJAH is stunned, SARMAN woops with delight.)

PENNY

Keep going.

ELIJAH

Keep going?

PENNY

Keep going with the story, whatever happens.

ELIJAH

So I was getting off the bridge and I noticed a parking space, which was a hundred and twenty blocks from Sarman's place but a parking space, in Manhattan. So I eased into the slow lane-

(She jumps on him again, madly molesting his face with a kiss and dry-humping his body. Suddenly, she leaps off him and assumes an attitude of bored listening.)

ELIJAH

It wasn't a big parking space. I mean, I would have to work to get it in there.

(She does it again. She retreats again.)

ELIJAH

But I had time-

(Again.)

ELIJAH

And it was such a pretty street-

(Again.)

ELIJAH

So-

(Again.)

ELIJAH

I-

(Again.)

ELIJAH

Stopped.

(Again. SARMAN is rolling on the floor. ELIJAH is covered in lipstick, disheveled. Only PENNY looks composed.)

PENNY

That was us all night. Keep talking but go to the window.

ELIJAH (rising and crossing to the window)

This view, I just love this suburban view. All the little compost bins-

(She pounces on him and rolls him to the floor. Then she gets off and moves away.)

ELIJAH

I'm sorry, but this is complete rape. I would have dialed 911.

(Again.)

ELIJAH

Is this the one you accidentally had sex with?

PENNY

Yes, you see what I mean? It all feels like an accident, a car crash. Like we should exchange licenses and insurance afterwards.

ELIJAH

That is so funny. It's like my first time. This guy invited me over to his house to show me his stuffed squirrel collection. Yeah. Stuffed squirrels. And he takes me upstairs to the attic-

(She lunges on him. Retreats.)

PENNY

I just felt like doing it again, you're cuddly.

ELIJAH

Can I finish my story?

PENNY

No, we're talking about me. (She hugs him.)

SARMAN

Why this sudden resurgence? From Margie?

PENNY

Well, she's unemployed and I have a house. Last year when she did it it's because she heard I was buying securities. I think it's her mercantile instinct. She's looking for housing.

SARMAN

Sex has gotten completely mercenary. (To ELIJAH) You see, it's like you, sex is all part of the rate of exchange.

ELIJAH

I haven't done that in months. Not since I moved in here.

PENNY

Really?

SARMAN

Really?

ELIJAH

Yes, really. I feel a lot less desperate.

SARMAN

Elijah, that's sweet.

SARMAN/PENNY

Awww...

PENNY (to SARMAN)

You saved someone from the street.

ELIJAH

I wasn't on the street.

PENNY

Not yet.

(He pounces on her, kissing her lips, then retreats.)

PENNY (straightening her hair coyly)

Well, now Senator. Shall we go over your agenda?

SARMAN

Elijah's gotten very domestic. He cooks. He has one recipe – Chicken Tetrazzini which is more Tetra than Zzini but eats well - with lots of red wine. Sunday nights we stay in and watch "Amazing Race." Then we trundle off to our separate rooms, like a couple of bachelor gentlemen.

PENNY

I'm sorry, are we done talking about me?

SARMAN

Ooops.

ELIJAH

Go ahead, you were in the middle of an extended ravagement.

PENNY

What I wanted to tell you is I think Margie's finished. I'm onto her and her fair weather games. I mean it was fun rolling around the house of my youth, it felt like I was humping on the alter or something, but... well, I've made a date with the shop instructor.

SARMAN

Oh, girl, work that lathe.

ELIJAH

I actually failed shop if you can believe it.

PENNY

Well, this is one class I'm going to do well in. She's adorable and has her own home and seems truly interested in something other than my account balance.

SARMAN

Penny dearest. You've taken to Jersey like a twelve year old drag queen to grandma's stilettos.

PENNY

All right, I have to run. I actually have an interview tomorrow.

SARMAN

Really?

PENNY

Yes, at the school where Golden works. Guidance counselor. We haven't even been out yet and she's getting me interviews.

SARMAN

Golden? Is she black?

PENNY

How did you guess?

SARMAN

Girl! "Take that hick town by the hide!"

PENNY

Oh, honestly, Sarman. You're the only person who notices things like that anymore. You and Robert E. Lee. So, final question: job prospects.

SARMAN

Nothing.

ELIJAH

That's not true. I've got him on Craig's List everyday and there might just be something at Estée.

SARMAN

In two months.

ELIJAH

But you'd be perfect for it. Someone's leaving, going to the Paris office and it's basically Sarman's old design job so...

SARMAN

In two months I might get my old job back. Isn't that pathetic.

ELIJAH

Right now I've got him looking in hospitality services. It would get him into the comp ticket mix and he's lovely with ladies of a certain age. Sister Parish types.

PENNY

Betsy Bloomingdales? Yes, I can see that.

SARMAN

It's all speculative and half of Manhattan is trying to get the same jobs.

ELIJAH

But people are calling back. We found out his phone actually has a working ringer.

SARMAN

Yes, Elijah has definitely focused my energies.

PENNY

They needed focusing. Well, this was swell-

(ELIJAH jumps on top of her and kisses her like before, then pulls off.)

PENNY

Ah, ok.

ELIJAH

I just wanted you to know how nice it was to have you over.

PENNY

Yes.

ELIJAH

When we first met I thought you were a bitch. Now I like you.

PENNY

Well I'm glad I took my bitchless tablets. Now we can't do this every time we meet, ok? Tonight was a play date but it's a little disconcerting.

ELIJAH

Not for me. You can't muss a bald spot.

SARMAN

You're not bald.

PENNY

This was fun, Sarman. I can't think of a night with you that didn't end with four bottles of vodka and you passed out face down on a mirror.

SARMAN (singing)

"When I was forty-six, that was a very good year."

PENNY

Or begin with you texting me from some alley off Christopher Street saying you'd been mugged.

SARMAN

Ah yes, my years as a ball street trader.

ELIJAH

Sarman's told me all those stories.

PENNY

He's seen the dark side.

SARMAN

"I did it my way..." Time to go. Out! Love you.

PENNY

I love you. And you-

(ELIJAH mock springs, she jumps back, but he doesn't go through with it.)

PENNY

Good night, handsome.

SARMAN/ELIJAH

Good night.

(She does a take. When she is gone they clean up as they talk. Eventually they relax on the sofa.)

SARMAN

I guess there was a time when I dreamed my life would be hanging around this place with boy models and society ladies. I used to treat Penny like my booby prize, my doormat. The person I'd call when I couldn't find someone classier to come up here. And then she was the only person I could call cause everyone else had dropped me. Now she's my old

friend who I've known for years, never mind that those years could be damn humiliating and I said many cruel things to her, out of defensiveness. If I spent the rest of my life apologizing it wouldn't be enough but if I spend the rest of my life enjoying her company, it might just be. There was one time, oh my Lord, this is what you do in AA – you brag. There was one time she came over and found me-

(ELIJAH suddenly jumps on him kissing him just like the Margie attacks. Like the Margies he suddenly pulls back as if nothing had happened, leaving SARMAN disheveled. He decides to ignore it.)

SARMAN

So she came over and I couldn't get to the door-

(ELIJAH does it again.)

SARMAN

Umm...

ELIJAH

Sorry.

SARMAN

What are you doing?

ELIJAH

Molesting you.

SARMAN

I'm actually poorer now than when we met.

ELIJAH

Maybe I should pay for it.

SARMAN

Uh...

ELIJAH

I'm joking.

SARMAN

Yeah, look...

ELIJAH

I'm not hitting on you. I mean I am. But not for money.

SARMAN
So, what's happening?

ELIJAH
I like you.

SARMAN
I like you too.

ELIJAH
I wanted to jump on top of you, like Margie on Penny. But I felt awkward about it, like Margie on Penny. So I thought I'd try the Margie on Penny approach.

SARMAN
What did you drink tonight? I'll stock more of it.

ELIJAH
Not just tonight. For about a month.

SARMAN
For about a month what?

ELIJAH
I've wanted to jump on you.

SARMAN
Well you can't.

ELIJAH
Why not?

SARMAN
Because I am madly in love with you and I've resigned myself to spend the rest of my life pining pitifully but without satisfaction for you.

ELIJAH (rubbing SARMAN's thigh)
I figured this would happen. You're scared.

SARMAN
Of you? Horrified. Stop touching me.

ELIJAH
Sarman.

SARMAN
What are you doing?

ELIJAH

I don't know. I've had an urge to kiss you, to... well, I don't want to get crude but-

SARMAN

Oh go ahead, get crude.

ELIJAH

Well, I'd like to take-

SARMAN

I'm joking.

ELIJAH

I've wanted to be with you for a while. Tonight just seemed the moment.

SARMAN

Did you get fired? Are you hard up for cash?

(Pause.)

ELIJAH

That's just rude.

SARMAN

Sorry, that was rude. I apologize.

ELIJAH (letting it pass)

Apology accepted. (He advances on him again.)

SARMAN

We have an arrangement, remember?

ELIJAH

Yeah. Great. I love our arrangement. Now let's renegotiate.

(SARMAN pushes him away and goes to another part of the room.)

ELIJAH

I don't know what happened, Sarman. I like you. You're generous, and kind, and caring and passably handsome.

SARMAN

Thanks.

ELIJAH

Maybe it's the freshness of it all. You seemed like a broken down old crank when we met, kindness somewhere down deep but crusted over with magma from a thousand bitchy eruptions over the years. Now you're just a loving, caring, clever guy. Your hair is natural color, your dress is sedate, you don't seem as wound up about bullshit, or like someone trying to prove something. You just seem normal. Normally you. And I like it. Very Martha Stewart, your own self, your own style. Like when she had that ankle bracelet, she looked pretty because it just seemed like the real her.

SARMAN

You know why that is?

ELIJAH

Me?

SARMAN

Yes. Your living here. It's the one right thing I've done in a decade. A leap of faith and I was awarded with a blessing.

ELIJAH

That makes me feel good. You make me feel good.

SARMAN

And I don't want to throw it all away.

ELIJAH

Don't be so dramatic.

SARMAN

You know what I'm talking about.

ELIJAH

I'm smitten with you, Sarman. You are older, a lot older, but you're real. The most real thing in my life, since my mom.

SARMAN

That's too much responsibility.

ELIJAH

I've never meant anything to anyone except her. I've lived my whole life with people who weren't changed at all by knowing me, except maybe to get a boner.

SARMAN

So beautifully put.

ELIJAH

When I saw you change, the transformation, I couldn't believe it, just by me living with you, coming home every night, becoming a part of your life, you became you, you were transformed. That's a pretty heady experience. Gives a guy confidence. I feel like I could do anything now. Anything.

SARMAN

You found me at a low point. Anyone could have helped me just by living with me.

ELIJAH

Penny didn't, your brother didn't. I know guys like you who'd just fork over, get their rocks off and then abuse me as a dumb prostitute. Or guys like Shrop who's never heard a word I said, assumed I was dumb and contented himself with doing all the talking. You love me, Sarman. Not my pecs, not my abs, you love me, I know that.

SARMAN

I also like your pecs and abs.

ELIJAH

Not so much. You don't gawk like you used to.

SARMAN

I've gotten good at using the mirrors.

ELIJAH

You don't know what it's like to decide all you have to offer the world is your body, to really give up and decide that's what you've got, period. And then have someone, out of nowhere, magically, treat you like a normal guy with a brain.

SARMAN

Don't forget your body's the first thing I noticed.

ELIJAH

And then you got past that.

SARMAN

Elijah, I've loved having you here. LOVED it. For the sake of some very satisfying, probably very professional sex which I'm sure I would LIKE very much, I don't want to give up what I LOVE. You are too precious a thing to waste on some phenomenal orgasms.

ELIJAH

Why not?

SARMAN

Don't joke. There's far too much for me to lose. I'm off coke, I sip wine now instead of chug Stoli, I sleep at night, I exercise in that gym downstairs I didn't even know existed till you discovered it. I clean, I cook, I follow soap operas. That whole world of Chelsea, that seamy world of being a troll in a bar has passed for me. I've become like a Penny. Another American suburbanite. Happily bourgeois and reliable. Don't ask me to throw it all away so you can satisfy some passing daddy urge.

ELIJAH

It's not passing. I've felt it for a while. Now I'm sure.

SARMAN

No, Elijah. Thank you. God bless you, but no.

ELIJAH

Then how about this? I'll stay here, we live together, no expectations, nothing, exactly as it always was. But you know, you just keep knowing, that I adore you, I love you, I think about you constantly, and I at least want something more, maybe the whole thing, the whole kitten caboodle. Just know that. And then, when you're ready to cross the living room, to come join me, you're always welcome.

SARMAN

You sure know how to bowl a guy over.

ELIJAH

I hope so. (They look at each other.) Well, good night.

(SARMAN touches his face with his hand. ELIJAH kisses his hand, looks at SARMAN. They kiss.)

SARMAN (breaking)

Lord, what am I doing?

ELIJAH

Don't worry. I know.

(They kiss. Lights fade.)

End of Act One

Act Two

Scene 1

(Two months have passed. Morning. SARMAN hustles around the room putting the final touches on his outfit.)

SARMAN

Honey, I'm all set. You up?

ELIJAH (off)

Yes.

SARMAN

You dressed?

ELIJAH

Almost.

(He enters stark naked.)

SARMAN

It just doesn't have the same effect on me. (He yawns.)

ELIJAH

Here. I'll stand up straight.

SARMAN

I didn't think it was possible but I'm beginning to see defects.

ELIJAH

Where? What?

SARMAN

Your arch is too round.

ELIJAH (crossing to bathroom)

Soon it will collapse from so much pussy footing.

SARMAN

Don't forget to- (Door slams.) Thank you.

(We still hear the horse like peeing. SARMAN continues to primp. He practices his interview skills. ELIJAH emerges and watches him.)

SARMAN

Shropshire, this view is to die for. My God, is that the Pierre you can see into? No wonder you have this telescope. Look at all those nice people having intercourse. And tissue right here beside the telescope. So convenient. (Indicating his scarf) This? Oh, just something I revived from the nineties. Dear Elijah went crazy for it. I thought it was very first Gulf War but he said it came back with Fort Hood. He advises me on everything now, everything.

ELIJAH

Don't swish. Shropshire hates swishing.

SARMAN

He's the swishest.

ELIJAH

He's grand, not swish. And can the scarf. It's Estée, it's a high-class firm, not the Halloween Super Store. You must be nervous, you're tarted up like our first date. Here.

(ELIJAH starts pulling things off of SARMAN – boutonniere, scarf, hat, sunglasses, overcoat, until he discovers something under SARMAN's suit jacket.)

ELIJAH

What is this?

SARMAN

A sash. You don't like it?

ELIJAH

If you were interviewing to be a Somali pirate. (Yanks it off him.) There. Much better. Wait. (He musses him about a bit, roughly.) Distresé is back. Give me your comb. (SARMAN hands him his comb, ELIJAH throws it away.) Use your hand, combs are over.

(SARMAN kisses him.)

SARMAN

Honey.

ELIJAH

I'm not honey.

SARMAN

El.

ELIJAH

I'm not El. (They kiss.) And not a word about me.

SARMAN

What would he do if he found out about us?

ELIJAH

Blow his butt plug.

SARMAN

He knows you live here, doesn't he?

ELIJAH

Yes. But he's bought the whole "I rent a room" jag. Leave it at that. Remember he's insanely competitive - be a blushing flower, a loser and he'll love you to death.

SARMAN

You are one big handsome boy.

ELIJAH

All right.

SARMAN

I love you.

ELIJAH

I love you too, Daddy.

SARMAN

I'm not Daddy. (They kiss.) "You're my big and brave and handsome Romeo..."

ELIJAH

Ok, basta... enough.

SARMAN

Enough. Yes. I can't go to my interview all flushed. My first in a year.

ELIJAH

Can I get dressed?

SARMAN

Go as you are. It's what everyone wants, it's why you were hired, let's just be honest for once, Samson.

ELIJAH (exiting)

Thank you. I thought you loved me for my mind.

SARMAN

“I’m old fashioned and I don’t mind it, it’s what I want to be as long as you agree...”

ELIJAH (off)

I hate those old songs.

SARMAN

That’s not old. Diane Weist sang it in *Hannah*. I never heard it before then.

ELIJAH

Hannah is old. It’s ancient.

SARMAN

“We all have our junk, and my junk is you.”

ELIJAH

New music for old people.

SARMAN

“Wake me up when September ends.”

ELIJAH

Can you sing one thing that isn’t from a musical or something that was turned into a musical?

SARMAN

“Oh, oh, say can you see...”

ELIJAH (entering dressed)

Lower pitch, start in a lower pitch.

SARMAN

You look great.

ELIJAH

Yeah, well, I’ve started stealing clothes. I’m able to put together much better outfits.

SARMAN

Oh, I loved stealing clothes. Till I got caught.

ELIJAH

Yes, yes, you told me. You convinced them you were Mona Ryder’s attorney and it was all research.

SARMAN

Winona Ryder.

ELIJAH

I still don't know who that is.

SARMAN

Aren't you going to shower?

ELIJAH

Squeaky clean is so Sarah Palin. It went out with combing your hair. Are we all set?

SARMAN

Yes.

ELIJAH

Now remember. Be careful, he's tricky. If he shows an interest in anything, make a comment and then change the subject. It'll be better to come off stupid, than smart.

SARMAN

Stupid but not swish.

ELIJAH

I'm not joking-

(We hear the door again, but much more efficient. "Shit," "Damn," "fuck" and it bursts open revealing PENNY.)

PENNY (hugging SARMAN)

Oh, my God, this is your big day. My little baby off to school for the first time, I've been shaking all morning.

ELIJAH

Penny!

SARMAN

This is more a formality. Shrop's already met me.

ELIJAH

Why does everybody have a key to this apartment?

PENNY

For the days when Sarman might need to be rescued. (Picking up discarded scarf)
Oh my God this scarf is perfect. Here I'll tie it for you.

ELIJAH

No, Penny, no.

PENNY

No, it's great.

SARMAN

He's already seen me swish, just not with a scarf.

ELIJAH

Just be yourself. Now you look like Oscar Wilde.

(They both stare.)

ELIJAH

Yeah, I know who Oscar Wilde is. I went to college.

PENNY (to SARMAN)

He means Quentin Crisp.

SARMAN

I thought the same thing. Why are you here?

PENNY

I came to give you a lift. I've been an hour on the New Jersey turnpike. How can people live that way? But I heard it was going to rain and I wanted to make sure you got there, without paying for a cab, dry and in good order. (To ELIJAH) Scoot for a second. Embarrassing things to impart.

ELIJAH (into bedroom)

Ok, I'm gone.

PENNY

Listen-

(Doorbell.)

SARMAN

Come in.

PAUL (entering)

Hey, Sarman.

PENNY

Paul.

PAUL

Penny.

PENNY

It's good to see you, Paul.

PAUL

I knew you'd be happy when that old junk I sold you showed a return, even in this economy. Now you give me some real money, I'll show you some real returns.

PENNY

No way, Paul.

PAUL

Suit yourself. Early bird and all that shit. (To SARMAN) It's your big day.

SARMAN

You guys are serious, aren't you? I must be some kind of loser I get this kind of encouragement on a job interview.

PENNY

Sar, you were doing back flips when they called you in.

PAUL

Back flips? Tour jetes!

PENNY

We just want to see you happy, dear.

PAUL

I was thinking it's like his first day-

SARMAN

Of school. Thank you for infantilizing me.

PENNY

Oh, sweetie.

PAUL

So I drove over to drive you up there so-

SARMAN

I wouldn't get my sneakers wet, yes I know.

PENNY

Don't be a grump.

PAUL (yanking scarf and handkerchief off him)
Lose this and this. And stand up straight. Are those the only shoes you've got?

PENNY

Paul.

PAUL

It might be a swish operation but for a job interview, you should always dress like a Senator. They want to see you conservative, you can camp later.

ELIJAH (entering)

Hey. Oh, now you look good. Yes.

PENNY

You guys have no idea how the world works.

PAUL

You're talking to the two men in the room who have jobs.

PENNY

And you're talking to the only woman in the room who owns a house, outright.

SARMAN

Excuse me. We should leave. Cars or not we have to be midtown in half an hour.

PENNY

Could you two step outside? I have something to say to Sarman. The real reason I came.

PAUL

I have something to say to him as well.

PENNY

In a minute. Elijah, take your brother-in-law into the bedroom and show him your shoes.

ELIJAH (taking PAUL with him)

Oh, they're great. Adidas from the seventies, gorgeous. Like antiquities.

PENNY

I'm very proud of you. You deserve this and though it's not going to solve all your problems it's going to make you feel better, working in a creative capacity, making fashion calls, having people under you. And the rest will solve itself. It will. You always land on your feet, Sar. You were right. You were also right about him. He turned out not to be a shmuck. I'm shocked, I've resisted it, but he's not a shmuck.

SARMAN

Penny, I don't know what's happened to me the last few months. And I don't know if it's a dream come true or more than I can absorb. But I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for all those years of just you and me. They were tough, really tough, only you will know just how tough. But you made them endurable. You did.

ELIJAH (entering)

Awww, so sweet, good times, let's go.

PENNY

Yes, we must.

PAUL

No, please you two, leave the room. I have something to say to Sarman.

ELIJAH

Paul.

PAUL

No, get. The straight brother wants to get warm and fuzzy.

PENNY (to ELIJAH)

Show me your shoes.

ELIJAH

There's only two of them. Oooo. I have this super retro lunch pail. It's Larry Craig. The thermos is shaped like a stall. (They exit.)

SARMAN

Yes, baby brother.

PAUL

Look, I just want you to know-

SARMAN

You're really proud of me and you knew I'd land on my feet. Well, I haven't yet and this might fall through so-

PAUL

Whatever happens, I... Victoria and I are happy for you. I don't think it's just Elijah, I think it's you and the spring in your step. I think that attracted Elijah, drew him to you.

SARMAN

Elijah is attracted to my stability. Old people are stable.

PAUL

We're not old.

SARMAN

We're dependable. We own things. Even if they're in hock.

PAUL

Sarman, you're finding out what I found out when I left Jinny. There is a second chance. What I have with Victoria is better, it is. Life can start at fifty. I'm glad you're finally seeing that.

SARMAN

Paul. There was a time, not so long ago, you wanted me to move into your garage. Now how is it suddenly you've stopped nagging me to get out of this place and-

PAUL

Sarman, you stopped being a drag. You became a mensch. The kids love you, they ask about you, used to be they didn't wanna be anywhere near you. Victoria likes you, you couldn't remember her name. You were turning into an old bitch. Look, what I wanted to say is however today goes and if by some fluke it falls through-

SARMAN

I was being negative-

PAUL

If by some fluke you flame through the interview and thereby flame the interview and it turns out this character who's called you in is closet straight and the love child of Anita Bryant and Strom Thurman, it's ok. We'll cover you. We want to see this all work. Victoria and I will cover you.

SARMAN

What does that mean?

PAUL

It means we have some money. We can take care of this mortgage. Make sure you can stay here.

SARMAN

How generous.

PAUL

I want you to relax. It's not about the interview, it's about you being a good guy. We're in your corner.

SARMAN

Suddenly you're a Midas.

PAUL

No, but we can afford a place in town, as an investment. You've let us stay here a few times, we'd like you to be able to keep it.

SARMAN

You don't have this kind of money.

PAUL

I do, Sar. For my brother, who I've grown to respect.

SARMAN

And you didn't before?

PAUL

I've always loved you, Sar.

SARMAN

But now you respect me. Why, cause I landed a hot young guy? Like you did with Vicky.

PAUL

Yeah, ok, I respect the kind of confidence that allows that to happen.

SARMAN

I have to get going, but you and I need to have a big old chat about what's cool and what's not.

PAUL

All right, Sar.

SARMAN

You've turned into Dad, you know that?

PAUL

Don't say that.

SARMAN

Yeah, you got that big-balled competition gene. It's not attractive, Pauley, throwing your money around like a mobster.

PAUL

Can I drive you downtown?

SARMAN

We're going with Penny.

PAUL

In that Volvo?

SARMAN

Yeah, in the Volvo. You can follow in the Panzer. "We're in your corner." You really get me, Paul.

(Door bell.)

SARMAN (barking)

Who is it? (Doorbell.) What? Come in!

(Light knocking. SARMAN crosses angrily to door and throws it open. There stands SHROPSHIRE, dressed immaculately, very poised, like a statue.)

SARMAN

Shropshire. My God.

SHROPSHIRE

Hello, Sarman. (Pause.) May I come in?

SARMAN

Yes, please do.

(SHROPSHIRE enters and looks about, slowly, with obvious disdain. Finally he proclaims his assessment:)

SHROPSHIRE

Comfy. (He turns an examining eye on PAUL.) You're not gay.

PAUL

No, I'm Paul.

SHROPSHIRE

Fascinating.

SARMAN

Paul is my brother.

(SHROPSHIRE looks at him and then looks away as if bored. ELIJAH enters, followed by PENNY.)

ELIJAH

Shropshire! Good morning.

(SHROPSHIRE regards them.)

SHROPSHIRE

Do you all live here? How college.

SARMAN

No, this is my friend Penny. She and Paul came down this morning to wish me luck, with the interview.

SHROPSHIRE

Quaint. (SHROPSHIRE looks about and crosses slowly to near the sofa. The effect of all this should be one of affect. SHROPSHIRE lives in a fantasy of his own creation. He commands situations by being slow, obtuse, odd, but always in charge. Having reached the sofa he looks at SARMAN.)

SARMAN

Please have a seat.

(SHROPSHIRE sits and acts as if the cushions are dangerously flat. He makes a drama of sinking and losing his balance and then recovers, perching on the edge of a cushion.)

SHROPSHIRE (to SARMAN, assuming questions)

No, thank you, I had a mocha and brioche at home. (To ELIJAH) That's a relevant question. I think an interview should be off-putting, like life, like business. So I came by, catch the sparrow in his nest, surrounded by all his delicate eggs. Aren't you supposed to be at work?

ELIJAH

I'll see you later, Shropshire. Good luck, Sarman.

(Moves to door.)

SHROPSHIRE

(To PAUL) Good-bye. (To PENNY) Good-bye.

PAUL

Bye. See ya, Sarman. (He and ELIJAH leave.)

PENNY

Bye, sweetie. (To SHROPSHIRE) It was a pleasure. A creepy pleasure, but an amusing one.

SHROPSHIRE

I have a fag hag. She's not as pretty as you, but she's rich. You're a dyke.

PENNY

A lesbian if you're nasty.

(SHROPSHIRE looks at SARMAN. SARMAN smiles at PENNY. She leaves.)

SARMAN

Did you want some coffee? I also have pube cake, from the local bakery?

SHROPSHIRE

Nothing.

SARMAN

Are you sure?

SHROPSHIRE

Absolutely.

(SARMAN sits.)

SHROPSHIRE

I've almost completely stopped using my office. I hate it. I visit people, keep moving. I'm ambulatory. I don't need a labyrinth to be a minotaur. I think it's much more exciting to intimidate people in their own space, don't you?

SARMAN

You certainly scare the shit out of me.

SHROPSHIRE

I think it's sweet your friends come to show their support on your big day. I have no friends. I have associates, clients and people I see for sex. Money is my lingua franca.

SARMAN

I don't know what to say to that.

SHROPSHIRE

Then best to say nothing. That is Elijah's room. Yours is...

SARMAN

There.

SHROPSHIRE

Just the two bedrooms?

SARMAN

Yes, that's it. And a sort of study.

SHROPSHIRE

Where you beat off.

SARMAN

You're kind of a pill, aren't you?

SHROPSHIRE

My mother called me that. I called her a drunk. Last time we spoke was 1985. So tell me, what will you bring to my firm? (Correcting himself) I'm sorry, to Estée?

SARMAN

Well, what do you feel the firm needs?

SHROPSHIRE

You've been coached to be modest, even loserish. I might be insecure but I'm not stupid. I want to be around smart, interesting people, not dull ones. It's only fun to abuse people you admire. What should I admire about you?

SARMAN

I work well with clients. I don't suck up to them. I just have so many different ideas I can inevitably find something they like or cobble together something they like from an amalgamation of concepts. Whatever you have me do I'll make people happy, happy to do business with you and want to do more. I'm not a financial wiz but I can learn that stuff fast if need be. I don't do Quickbooks or Excel or any of that clerical stuff so don't hire me as a clerk. I buy, I sell, I move product and schmooz. I did it successfully for seventeen years and then adequately for three when I was doing far too much coke and basically not sleeping. I've kicked the coke, learned to go to bed at night and have a deep admiration for how you've turned the company around from when I was there. Then it was dog eat dog. Now it's not so internal. It's Estée eats the competition, the ferocity goes out.

(SHROPSHIRE presses his watch as if it was a stop watch he had running.)

SHROPSHIRE

Ninety-four seconds. Rehearsed?

SARMAN

I know your personality protects you and that the games, if tolerated, actually get you to a secure place, not only for yourself but for the business. I won't deny I find them tiresome and immature. But I understand their necessity and I know with most people, they work, especially clients, who find them either intimidating, which means they take you seriously, or amusing, which means they like you.

SHROPSHIRE

I go through employees like a priest through choirboys. I offend everyone, including myself. Most of them don't have time to quit because I know when I've gone too far and I fire them quickly. HR hates me because of all the unemployment we pay but it's worth it. Those who stay are sharp, patient, and determined to please me, like Elijah, who I

don't pay that much anyway so it's an incredible bargain. How does he afford to live here? Don't lie to me.

SARMAN

He doesn't pay rent.

SHROPSHIRE

How generous of you.

SARMAN

It's not. I like the companionship.

SHROPSHIRE

Do you sleep together? Don't lie to me.

SARMAN

No. Do you always end your sentences with "don't lie to me?" It must be awful to think everyone does.

SHROPSHIRE

Let's get back to you – he doesn't pay rent. I'm having trouble visualizing that.

SARMAN

If you'd lived alone as long as I had you wouldn't. I like having someone here that I like.

SHROPSHIRE

Do you know he's a prostitute?

SARMAN

Yes.

SHROPSHIRE

Did you know we slept together?

SARMAN

Yes.

SHROPSHIRE

Many times.

SARMAN

Don't lie to me.

SHROPSHIRE

He's told you otherwise.

(Silence.)

SHROPSHIRE

Anyone could do this job. Anyone. My sole interest in you is your connection to several of the older board members. You are fondly remembered. I will be much appreciated if I bring you back. They'll take you to lunch, get drunk, reminisce about the old days, then sign over their proxies. You'll give me swing votes on the board when the board decides to do something moronic like fire me. Or sell me to the Feds. The rest of the job would in fact be a notch above clerical but you would be valuable at wooing votes, with your old friends. That is your sole value.

SARMAN

I want a job. I've always wanted to come back to Estée. It would be worth it.

SHROPSHIRE

Worth what?

SARMAN

I think you're risible.

SHROPSHIRE

Wait till you get to know me. How do you afford this place yourself? (SARMAN looks at him expectantly. Finally, SHROPSHIRE smiles.) And don't lie to me.

SARMAN

My bother owns it.

SHROPSHIRE

Elijah says he's quite the financial shark. If he has any insider tips I'd expect some. As a friend.

SARMAN

You'd have to discuss that with him.

SHROPSHIRE

I was rude to Penny, please apologize.

SARMAN

No need.

SHROPSHIRE

I hate dykes. I've know too many that ended up married to men.

SARMAN

Just as some gay men end up married to women.

SHROPSHIRE

Then I hate dykes irrationally. I'm prejudiced. Many people are. (He stands.) Well this has been pleasant. What do you like most about Elijah? You said you needed companionship, I assume he brings something specific to your insufferable life.

SARMAN

I like his youth. His outlook. His clean living.

SHROPSHIRE

He was a drug addict when I met him. Turning tricks for pennies. He is educated and smart, but desperate. If he's a clean liver it's because I cleaned him up. Ask him some time. I'm sure he hasn't told you that but he won't lie if you ask him. He's essentially honest, now. He just doesn't volunteer information. People like to help him, I know I did. I think that's his most endearing quality. His neediness.

SARMAN

He's playful, he's fun, he's caring, those are also nice qualities.

SHROPSHIRE

We still sleep together. Frequently. If you come to work with me that is the environment in which you will work. I faun on him. That won't make you jealous?

SARMAN

I have no stake in him. He's his own agent.

SHROPSHIRE

No, he's mine. I want that understood.

SARMAN

It is.

SHROPSHIRE

Don't lie to me.

SARMAN

Shropshire, I'm desperate to work, as I'm sure you can imagine. Sounds like I have something to offer you. So this would serve both of us. I will have to make compromises for this job, as I already have. You'll have to make compromises to hire me. Only you know what those are. Still I think, all things considered, we can make it work. I'd like the position.

SHROPSHIRE

You said you've already made compromises. What were those?

SARMAN

I lied to you.

SHROPSHIRE

About what? (Silence.) The cocaine?

(Pause.)

SARMAN

Yes, as a matter of fact.

SHROPSHIRE

Cocaine's only a problem if you can't afford it. You work for me you'll be able to afford it. And you'll need it. I'll be in touch later in the week.

SARMAN

Goodbye.

SHROPSHIRE

You're not what I remembered. From when you came by the office, when was that, six months ago?

SARMAN

Four.

SHROPSHIRE

You're centered. Calm. Something's changed.

SARMAN

You're exactly the same.

(SHROPSHIRE stares at him a bit and then slowly surveys the room one more time as if trying to find something nice to say. Finally, he sighs.) Oh well. (And he leaves.)

(Blackout.)

Scene 2

(Later that day. SARMAN sits on the couch. The door opens, ELIJAH enters, very low energy. He closes the door and stares at SARMAN, a look we haven't seen before.)

ELIJAH

I guess you didn't believe me.

SARMAN

About what?

ELIJAH

About being careful.

SARMAN

I was careful.

ELIJAH

I said if he shows an interest to make a comment and then change the subject.

SARMAN

I did. Frequently. I talked about all kinds of things, he seemed interested in all of it.

ELIJAH

All about me. He said you crowed, you preened, you acted like a newlywed, like a girl after her first kiss. He said he was surprised you didn't wear a corsage I'd given you. He said he felt like papa welcoming his little girl home from the junior prom.

SARMAN

I didn't get it.

ELIJAH

I didn't. He fired me. At six o'clock, after he'd gotten a final day's work out of me.

SARMAN

Did he give a reason?

ELIJAH

No, I did. A thousand, he said. Not coming into work on Saturdays, two-hour lunches, a hundred projects unfinished. He'd had Miss Clairol do it all up official looking. He had warned me, you know. Write-ups. Three times over the past three years. But they seemed so inconsequential. He's always writing people up. Fired for cause.

SARMAN

Why today?

ELIJAH

Why do you think?

SARMAN

He figured out about us.

ELIJAH

Yes. He said he'd never been so embarrassed for someone in his life as he was for you. You are so obviously so much in love, so demure and new brideish. He said you disgusted him.

SARMAN

El, I promise you I was not.

ELIJAH

No, probably not. Probably you were only very subtly preening, just flashes of confidence, squeaks of vanity, little things. But he's sharp. Sharp enough to realize, he claimed, after five minutes that we were sleeping together and that our cohabitation was more than a roommate set up.

SARMAN

And that's why he fired you.

ELIJAH

Yep.

SARMAN

And you just took it.

ELIJAH

No. I didn't. I begged him to keep me on. Begged. Sarman, I got down on the floor and pleaded for my job. I actually did that. I offered him anything, anything, even sex right there in his office or tonight after dinner, after he paraded me around town. Because only at the moment he handed me my dismissal, only at the moment he actually fired me did I realize I was unemployed in New York City with no chance of unemployment benefits because I was fired for cause. In the shittiest job market since the Depression.

SARMAN

Honey.

ELIJAH

Don't call me honey! I hate it. And I've asked you not to.

SARMAN

Well, I guess I didn't get the position.

ELIJAH

He's an animal, Sarman. I told you that. I told you he would only hire you if he thought you were absolutely harmless. He doesn't want competition, of any kind. The second he realized you were happy, confident, getting the piece he's had to pay for, he only wanted to get revenge on me for giving it to you. You disappeared for him, you evaporated,

everything you said after five minutes was just white noise. He sat there seeming to listen, but the whole time he was strategizing for me the most humiliating exit possible.

SARMAN

No one's that cruel.

ELIJAH

Of course they are. It's the new economy, Sarman. He's a viciously ambitious man who can go nowhere right now because nothing's growing so he turns his energy on people like us. He ruins lives because he can't enhance his own. He has absolute power and no one to exercise it on except me, so he ruined my life today. Unequivocally. He ruined it.

SARMAN

Are you going out?

ELIJAH

No. I can't afford it. I can't afford to leave this apartment. I have nothing. Nothing.

SARMAN

You've saved nothing?

ELIJAH

Not a penny. I've spent it all on clothes. Everything. I thought I'd landed on easy street. No rent, a job, kicked up my heels and bought all this. Now I can lounge around the house in it the rest of my life because I can't afford to go out.

SARMAN

I thought that was all stolen.

ELIJAH

Braggadagio. I've never stolen anything in my life. Too afraid of the cops. You know what the problem was? I wanted too much. I actually wanted to help you, to see you happy about your career, I put myself out there and you fucked it up royally.

SARMAN

Don't say that.

ELIJAH

It's the truth. I had no idea you could be such a pendejo. But you are. You're a pig.

SARMAN

El-

ELIJAH

No. Don't call me that. None of that. I'm Elijah. Not honey, not El, not big handsome boy. Elijah.

SARMAN

Elijah, what do you want to do? We should... unwind somehow, this is all very distressing.

ELIJAH

Distressing? It's a catastrophe. We need to find some money, fast. Can you take out a loan?

SARMAN

A loan? I guess. I have before.

ELIJAH

And your brother?

SARMAN

Paul?

ELIJAH

I heard him mention paying this place off, setting you up here.

SARMAN

You heard that?

ELIJAH

This morning, when you were in here. Well, call him. Right now. Tell him you don't know how the interview came out, you won't hear for a week. You can tell him it's all about a budget that comes out end of next week and then Shropshire can make the hire. Tell him it went well and you're confident and then tell him you want him to buy back the mortgage, in your name. Don't rush him. Just tell him you'd like to have lunch this week and you can nudge him forward then. But for Christ's sake, sound confident, tell him we're celebrating, tell him some fucking thing but don't fuck it up. For once. (He has picked up SARMAN's cell and thrown it at him, hard. SARMAN picks it up and calls.)

SARMAN (into phone)

Hi. Paul. Is this is a good time? It went fine. Great actually. I won't know for a week or two, you know they have to check their budget and Shrop's traveling the rest of the week, blah, blah, blah, but it looks good. A definite actually. Thank you. Listen. I wanted to talk over what you said this morning. Yes. Well, I first wanted to apologize. I reacted rudely. I said I... You heard me. Yes. Anyway, I appreciate the offer. Yes. Well, no actually. I don't want to take you up on it. As a matter of fact I am still offended by it but I also felt bad about being so rude when you offered it. The two aren't mutually exclusive. Well, Paul, I just don't feel it comes from a good place in you. I think it's smug and self-righteous and it will set up certain expectations on your part that I can't fulfill. I'm not a person to be kept. No. I agree, I don't think I'll make enough to keep this place. As a matter of fact Shrop said as much when I referred obliquely to more money. He said

emphatically, "Not possible." Well, I'll just have to figure that out when the problem arises. Uh-huh. I shall. I'm sorry you feel that way. Ok, Paul. Give my love to the boys and to, uh... what's-her-name. (Hangs up.) That first night, when we slept together.

ELIJAH

Yeah, you were my insurance. Against just this sort of thing.

SARMAN

And the first date? And the walking around here naked all the time. And the whole thing. (ELIJAH is silent.) And Shropshire?

ELIJAH

What about him?

SARMAN

He told me to ask you about him. He said you'd never volunteer the information.

ELIJAH

He was an investment. In the future. That's how we're supposed to think in this brave new world. Insurance and investment. Health and future. So much for my future.

SARMAN

Where will you go?

ELIJAH

Here. I'll stay right here.

SARMAN

I need some control in my life. Like you do, like Shrop does. Whatever the economy, I need to be able to say no.

ELIJAH

You live alone here you'll be dead within six months.

SARMAN

You stay here I'll be spiritually dead in a day.

ELIJAH

I will leave, I can do that.

SARMAN

Is this what we've become, scammers, planners, insurance takers?

ELIJAH

You might not be where you are if you'd thought ahead a bit.

SARMAN

You're not doing much better.

ELIJAH

Don't kid yourself. I can go crawling back to Shrop tomorrow. Give him what he always wanted, absolute fidelity. He likes to clean me up, see me make an improvement. I'll be back at my desk by ten, with a raise.

SARMAN

Why didn't you do that before?

ELIJAH

Because you came along. You're nicer. Your breath is sweeter. I'd prefer to do it with you. Even in your reduced state. Shrop's breath is disgusting.

SARMAN

Still a bottom card to play.

ELIJAH

Take my advice, call Paul back, say you were drunk, eat shit and take the money. He'll relent, like that. (He snaps.)

SARMAN

So you agree he's doing it to debase me.

ELIJAH

Who cares why he's doing it. Money buys things, simple as that. So buy something, right now. Make the call.

SARMAN

I think, as gay men, we should insist on more dignity from ourselves.

ELIJAH

Forget gay men. Gay is a luxury from an age of obesity. Fatness. It's lean times now, we can be feeder or food. Make the call, get some support.

SARMAN

I won't.

ELIJAH

Then I'll leave.

SARMAN

I know that.

ELIJAH

You want me to.

SARMAN

Of course not. I adore you. You know that.

ELIAJH

I don't feel the same.

SARMAN

I know. Still, I live, eat and breath you. You fascinate me. You're bright and intelligent and unbelievably attractive, naked and clothed. And there's even, in you, a ruthlessness that I... admire. It makes me hard.

ELIJAH

Good. I like that in a man. Hardness.

SARMAN

But you have to go.

ELIJAH

I don't want to.

SARMAN

No, because you're lazy. You've been at that job three years and you've gone nowhere. You want to coast through life and you'd like to do it here because essentially I'm a kind, gentle person. But sometime soon you'd crawl back to Shrop anyway. And then he'd have you, finally. And I couldn't share you. Not now that I know. So you might as well go to him. Today.

ELIJAH

I won't.

SARMAN

I can't even have you here. Not now. Much as I love you, you're... you're too brutal. Throwing that phone at me, telling me what to do, evading the truth about Shropshire all these months. You'd do that again. Soon. And I would take it. I want to stop it now.

(ELIJAH stands.)

SARMAN

I'm sorry about today. I didn't preen but I was incautious, arrogant, and I lied about us. He's so twisted, it might have just won his sick respect if I had preened. He knew I was lying though, I could almost tell.

ELIJAH

I like you a lot.

SARMAN

And I can't even believe I have you. At my age, at my... level of degradation, I have you.

ELIJAH

I've got to hang on, to something here.

SARMAN

I wish you hadn't said those things. They were hateful.

ELIJAH

You needed to know. You're right, I am lazy. So I need an ambitious person with his eye on the main chance. You're not the person, so I guess it's over.

SARMAN

Do you like me?

ELIJAH

I do. The sex was...

SARMAN

What?

ELIJAH

Never mind. (Pause.) Ok. It was... not good. You've let yourself go too far. Much too far. And I can do better, even for someone in your age group, even better than Shropshire who, though his breath is foul, at least has a body. You're flabby Sarman, your arms are saggy, your flesh hangs off you, and you make love with far too much passion and not enough skill, zero stamina and a childlike, puppyish technique. It's like you worship me, which is flattering to my vanity, but you have no pleasure for yourself, like you don't deserve it. You're old, Sarman and you punish yourself for it pathetically. It's kind of pitifully touching, but only for a minute, then it's just gross.

SARMAN

You didn't need to say that.

ELIJAH

You should know it. I'm not cruel. There's just a pecking order and you're way down it.

SARMAN

I got you.

ELIJAH

You dodged my defenses, like a rogue missile, the one that got through. You were so sad and needy and you had just enough, this apartment, some borrowing power, that I could rationalize the big leap. But there are no others out there like me. I've seen them, they are knee jerk savage, lightening bolt ruthless. I'm slow, and I have a conscience, and I feel sorry for people. I'd say the next one will do you in, leave you in a state, but I doubt there'll be a next one – right now you're broke, soon you'll be homeless, anticipating that the drugs will be the cure.

SARMAN

I know you're doing this to scare me, get me to change my mind.

ELIJAH

Change it, everything I said is true, but yes, you need to be scared. You're clicking on your life file and dragging it to the recycle bin.

SARMAN

Maybe then someone else can make some use of it.

ELIJAH

It's an electronic age, Sarman. You hit "empty trash" it goes nowhere.

(SARMAN crosses to the bar and looks for something to drink. There is nothing.)

ELIJAH

Don't do that.

SARMAN

Why not?

ELIJAH

Not in front of me.

SARMAN

Well, there's actually nothing to do it with.

(SARMAN picks up his phone. ELIJAH crosses to him and holds his wrist.)

ELIJAH

Call Paul. Dignity's a bad habit from a bygone era.

(SARMAN looks at him, gives him a kiss and then puts a call through.)

SARMAN (into phone)

Aziz, sweetie. Can you run an errand for me? Of course I still love you. I've been on...
I've been on vacation.

(ELIJAH exits. SARMAN hangs up the phone and covers his face. Blackout.)

Scene 3

(It is two months later. The apartment is filthy – clothes and plates everywhere. PENNY and PAUL stand in the room. They have been talking.)

PENNY

I just don't want to talk about it anymore.

PAUL

Because you know I'm right.

PENNY

I don't know that, Pauley. You think this is some kind of life intervention. I just see it as helping a friend.

PAUL

You help friends through a divorce. This is saving a life.

PENNY

Not being allowed to marry we wouldn't know about the first part.

PAUL

All right.

PENNY

Sarman is as close to having a partner as I've ever gotten so don't diminish my response to this.

PAUL

He's killing himself.

PENNY

Don't be ridiculous. He's on a bender. He's been on benders before.

PAUL

Two months is not a bender.

PENNY

Well then maybe it's time for him to die. (PAUL is shocked.) Don't stand there with your features all squeezed into the front of your face like that. Sarman has struggled with himself his whole life. Some of us could be gay anywhere, he had to be gay here, in boy's town. Well, he's grown too old for it but he's afraid to move because he can't believe anywhere else is safe for him. If he can't afford to stay here and nowhere else is safe then maybe it's time to call it quits.

PAUL

Oh, come on. He doesn't eat right, he does tons of drugs, he's drunk. This is an intervention, because if we get him somewhere safe, beyond anxiety, and dry him out he'll begin to feel a lot better physically, then he'll feel better emotionally. It's that simple.

PENNY

Sarman is an artist in an age of too many artists. He can't be cured of that. You can't change him.

PAUL

So we have to let him die?

PENNY

No. I'll ask him if he wants to stay with me a few days. Maybe I can pull him back a bit, slow down the process.

PAUL

The inevitable process.

PENNY (glancing at her watch)

I didn't say that. But he doesn't need to feel attacked, that won't help him.

PAUL

Why do you keep looking at your watch?

PENNY

Someone's late.

PAUL

He's always late. You know he missed Sammy's kindergarten graduation. That kid loves him, worships him, and he didn't even show up. I should be grateful, he was probably a mess. (Looks at his watch.) I'm sick of this!

(SARMAN enters. He is a mess, an unfocused mess. Obviously he is both drunk and high. He has trouble getting through the door. When he's in he doesn't see them at first. He can't get the key out of the lock. He struggles with it. Finally it comes out and he throws it belligerently across the room, with a vile, ugly expression on his face. It is not,

in a word, pretty. When he recovers from this action he sees them. Suddenly he smiles, a big grin. His emotions are that volatile. He is truly glad to see them.)

SARMAN

Pauley... And Penny... You guys look great.

PAUL

Where've you been, Sarman?

SARMAN

I went shopping. For food.

PAUL

Where is it?

SARMAN

I didn't find anything. They had nothing I liked. I looked at everything in the mirror but nothing, absolutely nothing went with my expression. That's the thing with food, it just doesn't go with anything. You can never be too rich or too skinny. So I'm working on the latter as the former is impossible. Rich is over. It is so 2006. Penny, how's Nutley?

PENNY

Beautiful this time of year, Sar. The trees are-

SARMAN

Pauley, I have something for you. (He suddenly lunges to his desk and rifles things.) Where is it? Oh, yes, here it is. (He holds up a paper notice.) There you are. (He throws it in PAUL's face, belligerently. Again, it is suddenly and viciously ugly, mean. PAUL just lets it fall to the floor.) Fine. Don't read it. Fuck you.

PAUL

Do you know why we're here, Sarman?

SARMAN

You want my keys? Here! Take them. (He throws keys at PAUL, they fall off his chest.) Take the place. I can sleep outside. I've actually started talking to the street people and the hookers, that's all I can afford to do is talk. They're very friendly.

PAUL

This is an intervention, Sar.

SARMAN

Ooooooooo... Like you read about. Well fuck you and fuck your intervention, motherfuckers.

(PENNY starts to cry.)

SARMAN (suddenly caring)

Oh, don't cry Penny. Don't cry. Here, here. Let me get you a glass of water. (He crosses to the kitchen and really has to focus to pick up a glass, fill it with water and carry it back to PENNY. He has filled it too high and he crosses the room, absurdly, balancing the glass, trying desperately not to spill a drop. When he gets to PENNY he hands it to her delicately, the water all still in the glass.) Awwww... (He rubs her cheek.) Drink this, and feel better. H2O. Hydrate. We must hydrate. (He suddenly turns away from her swiping her head with his arm and his jacket and spilling the water all over her lap. She cries out. He spins.) Shit. Here. (He grabs a piece of clothing off the floor and begins mopping up the mess, but his clumsiness is just making it worse.) There, much better.

PAUL

This is great, Sarman. Make an ass of yourself so you'll have to drink later to forget. Nice program.

SARMAN

You're deep, Pauley. You motherfucker.

PENNY

Stop saying that word, Sar. It's ugly.

SARMAN

But he is. He is a motherfucker. Vicki is a mother and he fucks her. And then she's a mother some more so he can keep fucking her. He used to fuck Jinny but then she stopped being a mother and became a cow and he didn't want to be a cowfucker so he switched to motherfucker.

PENNY

Stop it! It's gross and not funny.

SARMAN

Sorry.

(He sits and slumps pathetically on couch.)

PAUL

Sarman-

(PENNY puts her hand on his shoulder to silence him.)

PENNY

Sarman, sit up please. You have a visitor, someone coming, we want him to be able to recognize you.

SARMAN

This is my place, it must be me.

PENNY

You'll have to be very nice to this person, and listen, patiently. Look at you, I don't even recognize you.

(During the following she will sort him out, straightening his clothes, put a tie on him, make him as presentable as possible, as ELIJAH straightened him out before.)

SARMAN

This is me, Penny. This is how it is. This is how I recognize myself. I wake up in the morning feeling disgusting, gross, like I'm going to die and I don't know who I am. A few drinks, a handful of pills, and I'm shouting and talking to myself and falling down and calling people up and swearing at them and I recognize myself. I know who I am. A week ago, no three weeks ago... I went cold turkey for three days. It was amazing. I actually went off everything, except the booze, for three days. And I didn't know who I was. It was so boring. Everything was wrong. I kept saying to myself, stop being so vile, stop being so negative, stop hating everyone, but when I stopped the vile, the negative, the hate I was nothing, I was just boring, I bored myself. So I had a fresh handful and I became a lot more interesting.

PENNY

This isn't so interesting.

SARMAN

It is to me. After a lifetime of trying to connect I've decided to connect to myself. I'm the only person I like. Well that's not true. I'm the only person who interests me.

(PENNY's phone rings, she answers.)

PENNY (into her phone)

Yes, please come up.

SARMAN

Pauley, I'm sorry I called you a... (not wanting to say it) m...f...er. (PAUL waves him off: "Don't worry about it.") I'm actually glad to see you two. What took you so long? I've been waiting for an intervention for a month, I was beginning to think you two didn't give a shit.

PAUL

Jesus, Sarman.

SARMAN

No, it's incredible to think how much dependency cases look forward to their intervention. It's like a surprise party. You go around every corner expecting everyone to start cheering and throwing things.

PAUL

And we thought you'd be outraged.

PENNY

We didn't. Because this is not an intervention.

SARMAN

Aren't you supposed to gather all a person's friends? Everyone who's come to rely on you. Confront them with the full phalanx of their disappointment.

(Pause.)

PENNY

I did call him. We've talked.

SARMAN

How is he?

(Doorbell. SARMAN suddenly panics, he turns his back to the door, not able to face it. PENNY opens the door. SHROPSHIRE enters. SARMAN, not even seeing him, smiles.)

SARMAN

Now you are someone I'd recognize anywhere. That breath. (He turns to look.) Unmistakable.

SHROPSHIRE

I'm aware of my halitosis, Sarman. It's one of my charms, forcing people to pity me even when they detest me.

SARMAN

You are one creative thinker, Shrop. Did your parents send you to EST?

SHROPSHIRE

No, my parents were both very stupid people. I embraced perversity to mask what I'm sure is genetic imbecility. (To PAUL) Hello, Paul. One of my regrets of declining Sarman employment is losing you as a financial consultant. I haven't read about you.

PAUL

What's that mean?

SHROPSHIRE

It means I should have considering the people you've scammed and the investors you've defrauded. You seem to have escaped all culpability. I like that in an investment man.

PAUL

You're fishing.

SHROPSHIRE

For insider tips? Yes. I have a board member who's a big fan of yours. You were smart to keep her at the top of the pyramid. Higher than Penny here, I'm sure.

PENNY

I can stay in Nutley if I want to be insulted, Shrop. Tell him why you came.

SHROPSHIRE

I am telling him. Seems my board just can't do without you, Sarman. And I can't do without my board. So my perverse rationalization for this stupid compromise is that by bringing you back I'll bring myself into the fold of Bratner/Heines Investments, one of the few premium firms to be thriving in the new economy.

SARMAN

Well, this is all very confusing.

PAUL

He's offering you a job. Way to go, Penny.

PENNY

I knew no one could be the Prince of Darkness this guy paints himself. So I went by.

SHROPSHIRE

She found me a loquacious but gracious host.

PENNY

I found you a bigoted, self-loathing, homophobic troll. But I also found out that Elijah was no longer part of your life.

SHROPSHIRE

And with that annoying boytoy gone I actually could see my way to bringing Sarman back into the fold.

SARMAN

Where is he?

SHROPSHIRE

Pulling train somewhere for pennies, how should I know.

SARMAN

You know. Where is he?

SHROPSHIRE

He works in the gift shop at the Frick Museum. He works sixty-hour weeks and lives with seven people. They say he's happy. Poor dear.

SARMAN (as he crosses to computer and goes on-line)

You see how I am.

SHROPSHIRE

Yes, you're disgusting. But with a nice salary and some money to tide you over from Paul you could quickly become a functional drunk as opposed to a dysfunctional alcoholic.

SARMAN (to PENNY)

I can't even read. Can you tell me what that number is?

PENNY (looking at screen)

(212) 976-5000.

SARMAN (hands her his phone)

Can you dial it for me?

SHROPSHIRE

I would like you to come back, Sarman. It would be fun.

SARMAN

Do you really see me at a board function?

SHROPSHIRE

Of course. You'd fit right in. The men are all inebriates, the women all pill heads – you're a perfect hybrid.

SARMAN (into phone)

Hello, may I speak to Elijah? (He waits. Suddenly his face lights up, but he doesn't speak. He quietly hangs up the phone.)

SHROPSHIRE

This city does strange things to people. Fills them with hope, ambition, desire, and then deposits them on the curb with nothing but their new tie and a pair of Familiaris. They then shed their shark instincts, because they feel they didn't suit them, and rather than give up the city become a part of it, blend in somehow, become someone who works, survives, has friends and tries to live a reasonable life.

PENNY

I'm happy for him.

SHROPSHIRE

Happy? I'm embarrassed for him. With his qualities he could be king of the world. He let a couple old queens convince him he was a bad person when he should have realized he'd found his *métier*. Bad people and old queens have been making the world spin for millennia. He threw it all away because of a minor set back. It would be outrageous tragedy if it wasn't squalid melodrama.

PAUL

All right, that's enough. You should split.

SHROPSHIRE

Have I o'erstepped myself? That's what they said in high school, "You always take a joke too far." I could never figure out what that meant.

SARMAN

You cleaned Elijah up and turned him into a vicious monster. The things he said to me on his last night here were the things you're saying to me now. That's what it means.

SHROPSHIRE

Ah, well, Elijah is a joke himself so it makes sense he'd go too far. Penny, I did try. If he pulls himself out of this maudlin stupor I'm still willing to discuss it. He needs somewhere to go in the morning. (To PAUL) I hope your brother let's me do him this favor. I'd love to have you in my debt.

PAUL

They think you're creepy. Your board.

SHROPSHIRE

I know. Reptilian. That's why I don't have bad breath. I have a reptile's breath. When are people going to start loving animals? (He exits.)

SARMAN

No one lives on the Frick's bookstore. I'll have to go up there and stalk him. Ever so subtly. "Oh you work here? Wow? How have you been? Please come home. I'll give you everything, absolutely everything you ever asked for." I'd even beg you for money, Paul. Even though I hate your fucking superior guts. Woops, I didn't mean that. Trying to wedge myself in failure to protect my standards of dignity. Dignity. (Grandly) I'd be grateful for the subsidy, old man, and you and dear Victoria can domicile here whenever you're in town.

PAUL

You're right. I'm not ready for an intervention. I can't take the abuse anymore. Penny thinks you're going to die. You should hurry up and do it so I can tell the kids the reason we don't come see you is you're dead, instead of telling them the truth, you're just a dick.

SARMAN

How are the kids?

PAUL

They're fine.

SARMAN

Really?

PAUL

None of your business.

SARMAN

I thought you were stomping out.

PAUL

No, I just have to go feed the fucking meter. I'll be right back.

(PAUL leaves.)

PENNY

Sarman, he wants to take you away today. He has an ambulance arranged and everything. I think the whole thing's just drama, but he claims to have power of attorney or doctor or something-

SARMAN

Yes, my therapist has turned on me as well. Paul pays his bills so they are now in cahoots. I stopped going so naturally Dr. Bleckstein declared me suicidally insane and wants to commit me so the checks keep rolling in from brother Paul. I have only my refuge left and he'd take that away.

PENNY

It's his after all. He owns it.

SARMAN

I was wondering why those foreclosure notices stopped coming.

PENNY

He does want to help you.

SARMAN

I know.

PENNY

Look, I thought of something, when I heard about this scheme I told him I wanted to be here to help. He was suspicious and he should have been. We can circumvent this or at least postpone it a bit till we can think up something else.

SARMAN

Ok.

PENNY

Just agree to come out to Nutley for a week. You can bring all your stuff, your paraphernalia. But I think I can convince him it's a rest cure and he might fall for it. Then we'll stage a recovery - one of your three-day anti-binges - and get him off your case for a while.

SARMAN

Nutley. No.

PENNY

Come on, Sarman. It's beautiful this time of year. It will just be the two of us. I seem to have alienated all my mother's old friends and the lesbians there don't trust me anymore since I got drunk and fucked the high school teacher on our first date.

SARMAN (suddenly awake and interested)

You did?

PENNY

Yeah. Turns out she wasn't really out of the closet and the country dykes all feel I all but took advantage of her. The fact is she practically raped me. I was making her tea and she suddenly grabbed me and threw me under the kitchen table.

SARMAN

My God, you attract the combustibles, don't you? Was it good?

PENNY

It was all right. A little hectic. I'm not a big fan of linoleum as a locus por amour. When it was over she smoked a pack of cigarettes and then took me to bed, my mother's bed to be precise, and proceeded to molest me for another four hours. In the morning, you'll love this, she felt guilty. She actually had the nerve to feel guilty after five hours of the most detailed and committed love making I've ever had inflicted on me, like it was all a spontaneous mistake. How can a mistake last five hours? She'd been disgusted with herself for five hours.

SARMAN

Oh, honey. Sounds hot.

PENNY

Yeah, well the big secret is we're seeing each other tonight. She wants to apologize.

SARMAN

Better shove a mattress under that kitchen table.

(They start laughing.)

PENNY

Wait, you're me, this is her. "I'm straight. I know I'm straight." (Suddenly she jumps on him, molesting him. She breaks.)

SARMAN

Yeah, I'm straight too. (He jumps on her and molests her.)

PENNY

Wait, I'm going to smoke a carton of cigarettes and suck my way back into heterosexuality. Oh, fuck it. (She jumps on him, they playfully make sex noises and roll about, cracking each other up.)

(PAUL enters, having used his key with no problems. He sees them. They see him and break.)

PAUL

I knew it. I always knew it. Closet cases.

PENNY

Scientologists.

PAUL

My key works.

PENNY/PAUL

Oooooo... Symbolism. (They start humping again.)

PAUL

You two ok?

PENNY

I'm just demonstrating Nutley nooky.

PAUL

Nutley nutting!

PENNY

Nutley knowledge!

SARMAN

Penny's like Sherman marching through Georgia. She's cut a wide old lesbian swath through the Nutberg.

PAUL

You should sell that house. It's one of the few markets with any liquidity. You could get a good dollar for it and in these days that would go far.

PENNY

Oh, my God Paul is that all you can think about? Liquidity? Did you catch up with Shropshire? Is he in? Top of the pyramid? Waist level? Or waste level with the likes of me?

PAUL

It's called survival, Pen.

PENNY

I looked into it, Paul. I wouldn't make enough to buy even a lousy condo in town.

PAUL

No, but you could move to another suburb and get a much bigger place.

PENNY

I don't want to live in Nutley, Paul, why would I want a bigger place in a lesser burb?

PAUL

You'll never get back here, Penny. This town's only for the incredibly rich. Which is good because they're the only people who can afford to maintain properties like this.

PENNY (with a sigh, changing the subject)

We've been talking and I think I've convinced Sar to venture West with me for a week or two. To get him away from temptation.

PAUL

Not good enough. He needs professional treatment.

PENNY

Maybe, but I'd like to see how he does with unprofessional friendship for a bit. It might just work.

PAUL

He's been around enablers too long.

PENNY

Who would those be? He's been alone in here for two months.

PAUL

I meant all the years before when he was just hanging out.

PENNY

With me mostly. I made him a drunk?

PAUL

You certainly didn't stop him.

PENNY

You know what's really annoying about your young wife and your second family, Paul?

PAUL

Watch it, Penny.

PENNY

They've given you a ton of confidence. You didn't think you'd get away with it. You didn't think you'd have enough money to pay alimony, send your ex-kids to college and hold onto your honey, especially when it turned out she wanted a family of her own. But you did, you figured it out. You worked all your angles, your property, your investments, your entertainment schemes and you actually, in a bubble market, managed to hustle up enough money to hang onto her yet get out quick enough to avoid the crash. Now you're smug, so you can say whatever you like to people like me and Sar. You got away with something and, like all people who pull a fast one, you found morality at the other end of the rainbow. The pot of gold holds not just treasure but self-righteousness. While you have been through two marriages, Sar and I have been through one. One, Paul. I think I'm entitled to make a call here in my friend's life. I have that privilege and you should, by rights, support me. That's real confidence. Making a decision that will actually help a person in need not just boost up your sense of self.

PAUL

Ok, take a week. Take two. I'll visit you in Nutley and see how he's doing. On the twelfth, that's a date. Specifics when we confirm on the eleventh. You're wrong about me and Victoria. She'd stick with me even if I was broke. She loves me and for that I'd sell the world. I'd even sell out my own brother if she asked me to, but she hasn't. All she's ever said is she doesn't want alcoholics and freaks around her kids. So Sar's actually in worse shape now than he was six months ago. She won't have him in our garage and I won't leave him here. So you convince him to stay with you or he goes into a home, a tank, a cell, where he belongs.

(PAUL leaves.)

SARMAN

You know you're past hope when your friends talk about you as if you aren't in the room.

PENNY

I'm sorry I was such a bitch just now. He's not bad. I just wanted him to leave.

SARMAN

And he did. Now you should get going.

PENNY

We should.

SARMAN

No. You just bought me two weeks. I only agreed to go cause I knew it would get him to leave. Thanks.

PENNY

You won't be here in two weeks.

SARMAN

Did he mean it, that you said maybe my time has come?

PENNY

I was just trying to scare him off.

SARMAN

I've been thinking that thought myself. It's not that outlandish.

PENNY

It's macabre.

SARMAN

No, it doesn't even make me feel bad. I'm fifty-five. Until I was fifty I had quite a life. I really enjoyed it. Then it got bad but that was ok, 'cause I had you. Last year or so it's gotten very bad, because of money, bills, my desperate attempt to make someone else happy, a lot of things. I think finally it, my life, is drawing to a close.

PENNY

Don't be dramatic.

SARMAN

But it is dramatic. It has a dramatic arc and this is the end of it.

PENNY

Get your stuff. Come on. We gotta beat traffic.

SARMAN

You mentioned the rainbow. I've had it. I have. I loved my life at Estée and before that at Christie's and before that in college. I loved living in Chelsea and back rooms and bars and men, God I loved all the men. And then I was just bitter for a while, which sucked, but you sent me little rays of sunshine, once or twice a week and I'm grateful for that. And then Elijah came into my life and reminded me, one last time, of just how good a life it could be, even when things were externally so shitty. He did. Now it seems time to go.

PENNY

If you were serious you would have done it already.

SARMAN

I wasn't convinced before today. I think I was waiting for you two to come and explain it to me.

PENNY

Financial reality? You've been hip to that for a long time.

SARMAN

Hip to it but not accepting of it. Today I saw the picture. The corner, the dead end.

PENNY

Drama. Drama. Drama.

SARMAN

Go.

PENNY

No, Sar. Not while you're like this.

SARMAN

I'm like nothing. I'm trying to be honest.

PENNY

Now, I'll try to be honest. I can't imagine a world without you. If it means selling the house and investing in this place, let's do that. Let's just do it.

SARMAN

Your money wouldn't last long in town, Pauley's right.

PENNY

It's my money.

SARMAN

It won't be for long, not in this day and age.

PENNY

I'll go back to work. I can you know. Unlike you I have skills.

SARMAN

You'll work for what? Fifteen an hour, twenty? Twelve? It wouldn't pay for your clothes and food.

PENNY

Then what do you suggest?

SARMAN

I've already suggested it.

PENNY

Forget it. Suicide? That's crazy.

SARMAN

I can't stay here. Not alone. And I can't go anywhere, nowhere for me is right. I'm a dinosaur. I need to downsize myself, extinct myself. You haven't seen me on off days, it's not pretty.

PENNY

I have.

SARMAN

Well, then you know.

PENNY

Sar...

SARMAN

Look, go, go tonight. Come back tomorrow and we'll take it from there.

PENNY

No way.

SARMAN

Yes way. Please. I'll be fine. I will. A lot to think about. All the options.

PENNY

You're just being cynical.

SARMAN

No. There's Shropshire. That surprised me. And Nutley. Which will never happen but who knows. There's even crawl back to Paul, let him turn this into a proper pied a terre and I'll play upstairs maid. There's even El. He wasn't the baddy I thought he was. The

baddy that drove me to codeine and Stoli. He's a mensch. A normal kid who just wants to get by in the city. Bookstore at the Frick, that's very sweet. I'll sneak up there, if I can properly fortify myself with enough of this, not too much of that. One afternoon I'll find the alchemy and I'll sneak up there. Bump into him, just a day at the Frick. Oh, I got it! This will make sense to him: free day. Target Friday or whatever they call it.

PENNY

That's the Modern.

SARMAN

There must be some sponsored free day at the Frick. Pampers Tuesday. Blackwater Sunday. Let's look. (He makes it to his computer, looking for the website.) Ooooo, I'm getting excited. "About." "Plan Your Visit." That's it. Here. "Free Days." Look at that! (She crosses and looks at the screen.)

PENNY (reading)

Estée Wednesday. Each third Wednesday of the month free, sponsored by Estée Lauder. Bring a date for sunset dancing. (She is crying.)

SARMAN

You see. Perfect. It's kismet. I'll find my date in the scarves section. And we'll dance. Maybe, finally, we can just be friends. No one owns anything, no one holds a lease, both are broke. That's what we wanted. The real New Yorkers. That will be us. This sloppy thing called life. It sometimes disorders, but then it orders you. You discern the meaning in a tear drop, a kind word, the entrance of a friend, and then the door slams, locks behind you and there was no meaning at all, just a guise, a mask, a something that whispered but maybe never sounded, except to you, to your imagination, where it lodged in a preconception and became a thing. But a thing no more, at least not to anyone but yourself. You see? Nice tidy packages. Like when the ladies left the Estée counter. What had they actually bought? Cosmetics? No. A nice tidy package. That's what they walked away with, that's what everyone sees. That's us. A good day. A good solid day. One feels loved, safe, with options: a museum to visit, the Whistlers one hasn't seen in so long. Will one make the same mistakes? God, I hope not. But even if I do, my goodness, ain't that the bitch of life! "So let's keep living it, really living it..."

PENNY

And into the fire she dances. (She looks at him, touches his face. He wipes her eyes. She understands, knows it's time to leave.) I'll call you tomorrow.

SARMAN

Not too early.

PENNY

I know better. (She rises and sees the sunset.) O, what a beautiful view.

SARMAN

Yes, leave the curtains open. The sunset is spectacular.

PENNY

I feel so selfish. I have a date tonight.

SARMAN

That's good, Penny. Never be afraid to love. It's more important than life. I've had a lot of life and much love. Love is better.

(She hurries to him and gives him a big kiss. They hold each other, tight. Then she runs out the door. He relaxes.)

SARMAN

Those were my father's pistols. But people just don't do such things.

(The lights fade to black.)

End of Play