

NIGHTSHADE: A MELODRAMA

in Two Acts

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CHARACTERS

DOLORES JAMES

African American female. Early thirties.

SOLEA

White female. Early thirties.

JAKE

White male. Mid-forties.

THE COP

White male. Thirties.

HENRIETTA

White female. Forties.

DARLA

Hispanic female. Thirties.

PLACE AND TIME

Atlanta GA. Summer. The mid 2010's.

for Jackie Wolfe

ACT ONE

(Lights rise in the penthouse of Solea and Jake. Solea is sitting at a dinner table set for three, waiting. Belladonna is in a vase on the table. A butcher's knife is also on the table. Jake enters suddenly)

JAKE

What's so damned important?

SOLEA

You're late.

JAKE

Late? What the hell are you talking about . . .

SOLEA

I called at four. You said you were on your way –

JAKE

And you know I don't like being called at work.

SOLEA

Really?

JAKE

Quit playing stupid. You'll piss me off more.

SOLEA

I needed to see you.

JAKE

And I'll ask again: what is the problem?

SOLEA

I have dinner prepared. And, to accommodate the circumstances, I thought we'd eat early.

JAKE

Why?

SOLEA

I thought we'd talk.

About what? JAKE

I called your woman. SOLEA

Excuse me? JAKE

That is, your mistress. SOLEA

My mistress? You're serious? JAKE

(Silence. He laughs)

I invited her over. SOLEA

(He stops laughing)

You what? JAKE

She'll be here any minute. SOLEA

Any minute? . . . Are you out of your – You called . . . JAKE

Yes, Jake. I want your mistress to join us for dinner. SOLEA

Join us – What th' . . . Hold it! I don't even have a – JAKE

Please! Do not insult my intelligence by lying. SOLEA

Shit . . . ! JAKE

SOLEA

Sit down. Have a drink. It'll calm you.

JAKE

You called and invited . . . Oh, you – BITCH!

SOLEA

Relax. I'm having my lover over, too.

JAKE

Come again . . . ?

SOLEA

It's why I had to move dinner up a notch. A schedule needs to be accommodated.

JAKE

You've gotta be kidding?

SOLEA

My illicit other half will be walking through that door, as well.

JAKE

Good Lord!

SOLEA

Let me make you a drink.

JAKE

Screw the damn drink. I know what this is.

SOLEA

Excuse me?

JAKE

You're trying to make me give you that divorce, then force my hand and attempt with all your mother-wit to bleed me dry.

SOLEA

Oh, Jake –

JAKE

Poor broken down Solea will divorce me, then find a way to raid my coffers. And before it's said and done, you'll have cut a hole in my deep pockets and

drank your damn fill.

SOLEA

Will you stop it? The world and the universe cannot be reduced to the amount of your and your family's dirty money.

JAKE

Dirty money? What are you insinuating?

SOLEA

Nothing at all, baby. Nothing that could hurt you, at least.

JAKE

Fuck you, Solea.

SOLEA

We're passed that.

JAKE

You've lost your mind. I've made you crazy.

SOLEA

Sit down.

(The doorbell rings)

Entre!

JAKE

God help me!

(Dolores enters. She smiles upon seeing Solea – then is shocked on sight of Jake)

Oh, quit looking so damned surprised. Like you've never been caught with your knickers down.

SOLEA

Dolores, I'm sure you've met my husband.

JAKE

Dolores? Well!

SOLEA
Please, have a seat.

(Dolores sits)

Would you like a drink? Cabernet, perhaps?

DOLORES
Yes, if you have it.

SOLEA
Of course. Jake?

JAKE
Sure. What the hell!

SOLEA
Voire!

(She pours two glasses)

JAKE
Alright. So far, we've got a *menage a trois*. Still awaiting one more for the *menage a quatre*, right?

SOLEA
Menage a quatre . . . ?

JAKE
Right – Hold it! Wait just a damned minute – Dolores? . . . *How in the fuck did you know who she was?*

(Silence)

Have you . . . have you been spying on me?

(Again, silence as Solea walks over to Dolores, hands her the wine, then kisses her mouth)

SOLEA
What do you think?

(Jakes skin turns a whiter shade of pale as

Solea gently breaks from Dolores. Lights fade. Dolores rises and moves DSC. An overhead spot fades in above her)

DOLORES

I met Solea in a bar one night. I asked her to dance. And saw that she'd been crying. After fighting with her husband, she decided to take a drive. She drove out of the city limits and back, then parked and walked, wandering the Atlanta streets like a haunted shadow, then into a lesbian bar. Solea managed to pull herself together and tell me that she wasn't accustomed to this kind of place.

(Lights fade in on Solea in US limbo)

SOLEA

I'm a married, but lonely. I just needed to find a place where I'd not have to suffer being married and lonely . . . alone.

DOLORES

I said I didn't want to hear her life story. I only wanted to get laid.

SOLEA

Oh.

DOLORES

Do you wanna dance?

SOLEA

Sure. Okay

(They begin dancing to a slow song)

DOLORES

Are you scared?

SOLEA

Should I be?

DOLORES

You'll be fine. We won't bite. Unless you want us to.

(They laugh)

Over time, we'd fall in love, blind to everything around us, seeing only ourselves and the white-hot fire of love burning us . . . into smoke.

(They kiss. Solea exits)

(Dolores enters her condo, then steps into her bedroom and begins removing her clothes. Naked, she slips into a short, sexy silk robe)

Meanwhile, there was my profession, which demanded that a warm and cozy spot remain between my thighs for a man, too. *C'est-a-dire si le prix est correct!*

(She applies make-up and “fixes” her hair. Lights rise in the living room of the condo. The doorbell sounds)

The gentleman I’m expecting is what you’d call an accidental client. He’s a detective, Atlanta PD. Vice. He’d been working undercover as a potential customer when he made an appointment with me. I peeped his card with the very first whiff of his pig ass.

(She answers the door. The cop awaits with flowers, which he hands to her)

Bachelors Buttons?

COP

An omen of what’s to come.

(He enters. She sets the flowers in a vase with water as she speaks)

DOLORES

He couldn’t bust me because, since I was onto him, I did nothing that would infer a chance to, as the pimps would say, get his swipe in me. I wouldn’t even let the motherfucker smell it or encourage him to play with himself. I simply took off my clothes and danced naked as he watched. Which is what he did. As well as pepper me with a lot of annoying questions.

COP

Been doing this long?

DOLORES

A while.

COP

Are you a student? You working off your tuition?

DOLORES

Nope. And nope.

COP

Do you have kids?

DOLORES

None that I'm aware of.

COP

Don't you have a family?

DOLORES

No. I was cultured in a test tube.

COP

Oh, c'mon! Does your family know what you do? What about your mother . . . ?

DOLORES

I don't discuss my family.

COP

Is this all you do? You got another job? What about this condo? Is it in your name? Who's paying for all this . . . ?

DOLORES

And so forth, and so on. I just wanted to stop and throw a shoe at him.
Have things gotten that bad with your wife?

COP

You could say that. It's funny: from the start, the whole arrangement was a mere blur.

DOLORES

And now, things have gotten quite clear, I take it.

COP

Yep. After all this time, we finally see ugly.

DOLORES

Oh, baby.

(She kisses him)

Sit down. I'll get you a drink.

(He sits as she pours him a glass of cabernet)

Failing to make a bust, a week later, he came back. But I refused to let him in. I told him I didn't need his business. And I give no second chances to "get it up." Then . . . shit! He started to cry.

COP

I'm sorry. Please. I need to talk to someone. That's all. Don't worry, I'll pay. I've got five hundred dollars cash. On me. It's yours. Just . . . please! I need to talk.

DOLORES

And if I refuse?

COP

I'll bust you. Yeah, I know – you think you're smart and that you've got your bases covered. I know a lot about you, though. Enough, in fact, to have you renditioned to jail for a good long time.

DOLORES

So, I let him in, then allowed the pathetic bastard to lay his head in my lap and talk. About his wife. And his deteriorating marriage.

Yeah, it's stupid, but . . . I was cornered. What was I supposed to do? Hell, I even went ahead and let the son of a bitch fuck me.

Again . . . what could I do?

(She brings him the wine and sits beside him)

It's become something of an arrangement now, I guess. He comes to me with money, an unabated need, and we talk. Then fuck. Always in that order. I have to admit that, in spite of it all, I've gotten a little sweet on the guy.

I mean, at least he's got the decency to keep paying me this goddamned bird feed. What's more, if he should decide to turn on me – or turn me in – I've got a plan . . . a way to vindicate myself and have it cum all over his pasty cops face.

COP

We busted the Peachtree Street Madam this morning.

DOLORES

You're kidding!

COP

Her and the entire consortium are now on ice.

DOLORES

I suppose I'm lucky.

COP

Or, maybe, you're just the one that got away. Like in the movies.

DOLORES

Or . . . maybe . . . you're my white knight-light, scaring away the dragons.

COP

Or, perhaps, you're just a great piece of ass that went straight to my head.

(They laugh. Dolores takes the glass of wine from him, sets it on the coffee table, and pushes him down on the sofa and straddles him)

I wonder if the Department is on to us yet.

DOLORES

What? Don't you know how to hide your tracks?

COP

Yeah, but my vision's only peripheral. I ain't got eyes in back of my head.

(She kisses him)

DOLORES

We'll have to watch one another's backs, won't we?

COP

I guess.

(Another kiss)

Do that again.

(She does so)

Damn, if I'm not getting stuck on you –

DOLORES

Stop.

COP

C'mon. It can't be helped.

DOLORES

Sure, it can. Don't complicate shit. It's what we discussed. Remember?

COP

That . . . and how you were already onto me when I thought I could bust you.

DOLORES

I smelled you through the closed door.

COP

And that was bullshit. You peeped me at that bachelor party –

DOLORES

Hosted by none other than the Peachtree Street Madam herself.

COP

So many girls! You among them.

DOLORES

An invited guest. By none other than the Madam herself.

COP

All the eggs in one big basket.

DOLORES

Which makes me wonder: why didn't the bust go down that night? Why wait –

COP

Let's just say that a complete razing needed to be avoided.

DOLORES

I don't get it.

COP

The sons of a couple of city heavyweights, as well as a few heavyweights themselves –

DOLORES

Were among the guests of honor. Of course.

COP

Right! Cages had to be rattled, sure. We just didn't need to bring down the whole zoo.

(Another kiss, and she removes her robe.
Naked, she begins making love to him)

My wife . . . just before I left for work this morning . . . finally mouthed the poisonous word.

DOLORES

Divorce.

COP

And, man, did it take effort. Would you believe she even puked right after she said it –

DOLORES

Shut up. Don't fuck up the moment.

COP

Right.

(Dolores' motions are slow and sensual.
Fade out on the scene)

(Lights rise on Solea entering the condo.
She notices the wine, still in the same
position. She takes it up and drinks.
Dolores enters, having just showered)

SOLEA

Hate to see it go to waste.

DOLORES

You're turning into a lush!

SOLEA

My weakness.

(While drying her hair with a towel, Solea

steps up to Dolores and kisses her mouth)

Where is it?

DOLORES

The painting? Downstairs, in storage.

SOLEA

Saving it, huh?

DOLORES

Well, I thought of hanging it in the bedroom, but . . .

SOLEA

Wouldn't want your customers to think you go both ways?

DOLORES

Not that some of them wouldn't mind if I did.

SOLEA

Wouldn't they pay more for that?

DOLORES

Sure. But –

SOLEA

Money isn't everything.

DOLORES

And I'm never one to mix business –

(A kiss)

. . . with “everything.”

SOLEA

Besides, I couldn't handle the thought of you with another woman. Money be damned!

DOLORES

I appreciate that.

(They embrace and kiss)

I'll get you a fresh glass.

SOLEA

Was the cop here?

(Dolores pours more Cabernet into a clean glass and hands it to Solea)

DOLORES

Yep. Poor guy.

SOLEA

I'll say it again – be careful.

DOLORES

Not to worry. Something, either me or his wife, has taken the sting out of him.

SOLEA

In other words, he's dying slowly.

DOLORES

The marriage, anyway. Not just on the rocks but shipwrecked.

SOLEA

You're not thinking of taking that fallen angel in, are you?

DOLORES

No, but something tells me he may be entertaining the thought.

SOLEA

Which means –

DOLORES

I know. I may have to play the mean bitch and kick the puppy down the steps.

SOLEA

Will he give you a clean break?

DOLORES

He'll have no choice. Besides, he's a grown up.

SOLEA

No, he's a cop.

DOLORES

I'll be fine. It hasn't come to that, anyway. And, trust me, it won't.

SOLEA

You're sure?

DOLORES

I've got a plan, sweetheart. Something that will fuck him in the worst possible way. *If it should come to it.*

SOLEA

But won't that –

DOLORES

We'll both go down, sure. Yet the drone bee will suffer the worst of it. As they always do.

SOLEA

I hope you know what you're doing.

(Solea drinks the wine down. She and Dolores get intimate on the sofa)

How much longer?

DOLORES

We'll give it another year.

(Solea groans)

We can make it, baby. By that time, between us, we'll have more than enough to set ourselves up. Along with the money, I've got real estate, a share in the business with Henrietta. And when you divorce Jake, no doubt you'll swing a healthy settlement.

(Solea scoffs)

What? . . . Wait: you didn't sign a –

SOLEA

No. A prenup was out of the question, as far as Jake was concerned. Though it doesn't mean we cease to exist within the realm of old money, which is sacred. And untouchable. I'm an outsider, like Jane Eyre. And you can bet your ass that if I go, another Civil War will have come and gone before he or his family cede

a nickel of said wealth to one such as I. Oh, I might get to help myself to a few fatty scraps. Yet the lean meat will be kept out of reach and on the table.

DOLORS

So what if it is? We'll be okay, baby. And by years end, we'll be great.

(They kiss)

SOLEA

We'll build that house in Monterey, won't we?

DOLORS

A big, two-story house overlooking the coast? Yeah! I've already got the land.

SOLEA

A house on the coast! In California!

DOLORS

And there'll be a studio. Big and airy. Where you can work.

SOLEA

With a skylight!

(Another kiss)

Do you really like that painting? . . . The two of us side by side on the sofa . . . naked and smiling?

DOLORS

The best thing you've ever done, baby! Of course.

SOLEA

Our "American Gothic!"

(They laugh)

We'll hang it in our new home.

DOLORS

In our bedroom.

SOLEA

No, the living room.

DOLORES

Are you sure?

SOLEA

Why not? It's "American Gothic." What's to be ashamed of?

(Dolores laughs)

DOLORES

Sure, baby. Sure.

(They kiss again)

Money aside, Jake *will* agree to the divorce, right?

SOLEA

If he agrees to it, or not . . . it won't matter.

(Silence)

Don't worry.

(Solea rises and exits)

In the movies, people like us, so hot and in love, might have broached the idea of simply killing that nettlesome spouse. Anything to consummate our love. And have things just as we wanted.

Would that the world could be worked out as artfully, as neatly, as a movie script. If we all didn't want happiness on our own terms . . .

(Lights rise on Jake at home, awaiting Solea. After a few moments, she enters)

. . . perhaps there'd be a little less messiness to it all.

(Fade on Dolores)

JAKE

Where have you been?

SOLEA

What do you care?

JAKE

Solea, we're having dinner with important people tonight. And seeing that you've got only twenty minutes to get ready . . .

SOLEA

I'm not going. I'm staying home.

JAKE

Like hell you are!

SOLEA

I don't want to go, Jake.

JAKE

I refuse to show up at this dinner without –

SOLEA

I'm not going. And do not try to make me. And if you absolutely cannot show up alone . . . *hire an escort.*

JAKE

Quit playing with me, goddammit.

(Solea laughs)

If I could get away with it, I'd smack you through that window.

SOLEA

What's this? Finally coming into our manhood?

JAKE

Where were you?

SOLEA

Out.

JAKE

Where?

SOLEA

I went to visit a friend.

JAKE

Anybody I know?

SOLEA

I doubt it.

JAKE

Solea . . . I swear, if you flake out and leave me in the lurch, I'll . . .

SOLEA

What? Beat me up?

JAKE

Who did you see today? Was it a client?

SOLEA

It was a friend. I told you.

JAKE

Man, or woman?

SOLEA

What difference does it make?

JAKE

Plenty.

SOLEA

I saw a friend. Now, go to your stupid dinner with those fucking nabobs and leave me alone.

JAKE

You won't come with me?

SOLEA

I don't feel like going.

JAKE

This is the third time you've come home at this hour. Normally, when I get back, you're in the studio. What gives?

SOLEA

Do you suspect something?

JAKE

I've told you to quit playing with me.

SOLEA

Act like a man around here, and I just might.

(Silence)

JAKE

Are you having an affair? Yes, or no? Are you, or are you not fucking somebody behind my back?

SOLEA

And what would you do if I were? *Divorce me?*

JAKE

Is that what you want?

SOLEA

Wrapped, tied with a red bow, and sitting under the Christmas tree.

JAKE

Solea – Give me a direct answer: are you screwing around?

SOLEA

No.

JAKE

You're lying.

SOLEA

Then file for a divorce.

JAKE

Oh, you want me to make this easy, is that it?

SOLEA

Well, if you think I've been unfaithful . . .

JAKE

No dice, baby. I flat-out refuse the concession. What's more, you're in way over your head. Sneaking around is not in your nature, and it is not your game.

SOLEA

You don't know me as well as you think.

JAKE

Goddammit, woman, I know you from head to foot! You haven't the street smarts of a teenaged girl as to what you're getting into. I'm married to you, sweetheart. I've lived with you, eaten with you, fought with you, and tossed, turned and fucked in the same bed with you for the past six years. I know exactly where your next footstep will fall before you do. And in having an affair, you are out of your league. And when it's all over, you'll be the one to crash and burn. And don't be surprised to see me dancing on the wreckage.

SOLEA

Oh, Jake . . .

JAKE

Y' know, it's sinful and perverse, but something in me wants to watch the whole thing. I'd give half my family fortune to bear witness to my weak and ineffectual spouse making a complete idiot of herself.

(She scoffs)

And whoever he is, I wonder how long it will take before he gets tired of trying to fuck something that doesn't have the bedroom-smarts of a Kewpie doll.

(Solea rises and motions to strike him, but Jake catches her arm)

What do they say about the truth, baby? How it hurts like a rough fuck?

(She wrests herself from him)

If you know what's good for you, end it now. Get out of it, or you'll be set up for a world of hurt.

SOLEA

And would my being a woman have anything to do with this assessment?

JAKE

The fact that you're *Solea* completes about half of the puzzle. And, yes, I suppose your clueless femininity would fill in the empty spaces.

SOLEA

God, I hate you.

JAKE

No, honey. You hate yourself. But, please, do go and walk the illicit tightrope

with your newfound boy-toy. And do try to enjoy it while you can. The imminent fall will be hard and messy.

And let me reiterate my refusal to concede to a divorce. A bullet would have to split my skull before I'd part with you.

SOLEA

My! I never knew I was so loved.

JAKE

On the contrary: I simply won't let the sonofabitch win. In fact, it's not beneath me to beat his ass out his clothes, if it should come to it.

SOLEA

Has it occurred to you that I'm not some goddamned chattel slave? And that there's no law that says I have to stay married to you . . . ?

JAKE

I will not concede to a divorce.

SOLEA

We'll see about that. When I take it before a judge.

JAKE

I wouldn't, if I were you.

SOLEA

Is that a threat?

JAKE

I've never levied a threat in my life.

SOLEA

So what are you saying . . . ?

JAKE

That divorce is out of the question.

SOLEA

And if I should decide to leave you . . . ?

JAKE

You won't.

SOLEA

Well, what do you have in mind if –

JAKE

I'll cook something up. I promise. Now I'm done talking about it.

SOLEA

Are you sure? I sense there's more to tell.

JAKE

Solea . . .

SOLEA

I mean, why choose to torment ourselves when we can just end it all . . . ?

JAKE

Because it's out of the question! I will not give you a divorce! Now go and get your ass ready. You're going to this dinner with me tonight. And if I were you, I'd cease giving me any more lip. GO!

SOLEA

You're nothing at all like your daddy, are you?

(Fade as Solea rises and exits to get dressed)

(Lights up in the escort agency office. Henrietta is on the phone. She speaks with an English accent)

HENRIETTA

. . . Yes, Mr. Ross. And she'll be staying overnight, correct? . . . Of course. No problem . . . Correct. In Toronto, yes . . . And you'll be taking the same girl, right? . . . That's one thousand up front and another thousand upon arrival . . . Anything else is discussed between you and Raquel . . . Alright, hon. Ta! Ta!

(She hangs up as Dolores enters and sits)

DOLORES

The Peachtree Street Madam was busted.

HENRIETTA

I heard. Though I'm not surprised. By the mayors' initiative, vice is hitting everyone in the business. Relentlessly. Well, most everyone, that is.

DOLORES

But we're okay?

HENRIETTA

Darling, I've still got two choice girls heating the deputy mayors bed, and another whose undies are kept by the Atlanta Chief of Vice.

DOLORES

And that quintet of vice cops, are they still in our cage?

HENRIETTA

For as long as the money softens the cage floor, yes.

DOLORES

Why us?

HENRIETTA

Good question. Which I won't beg to ask. In any event . . .

(She hands Dolores a check)

. . . there's your percentage.

DOLORES

Thank you, dear.

HENRIETTA

None of that is from our cop, I take it?

(Silence)

Watch your back, hon.

DOLORES

As long as the arrangement between us stands I'll be fine.

HENRIETTA

Are you sure you know what you're doing?

DOLORES

I'd better. He's got me to the wall. Anyway . . . I'll be out of the life in a year.

HENRIETTA

If he doesn't nail you first.

DOLORES

He's having marriage issues. He's depressed. The man is wrapped around my ankle. He's harmless.

HENRIETTA

And a cop.

DOLORES

Yet, considering the circumstances, if I go –

HENRIETTA

Can anyone other than yourself prove that there's a relationship?

DOLORES

Sweetheart, I don't think this cop will bust me. Not really. He would have done it long before now, in fact. Trust me. Please.

HENRIETTA

I'm just not entirely sure . . .

DOLORES

Alright! If you want the truth, in spite of everything – yeah, maybe a part of me is feeling a little soft for the guy. But at least he still pays me.

HENRIETTA

That's all very nice, but –

DOLORES

Besides, if it should come to it, I've got a plan.

(Henrietta is about to speak)

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

HENRIETTA

You want a drink?

DOLORES

Please.

(Henrietta pours a glass of Cabernet)

HENRIETTA

Still have your heart set on California?

DOLORES

Me and my lover, yes.

(She hands her the drink)

HENRIETTA

Monterey! The Northern California coastline! The rocks, the waves. If I lived there, I think I'd die.

DOLORES

And we plan to do just that. Live there . . . till we die.

HENRIETTA

Love is beautiful, isn't it?

DOLORES

And I'm blessed to have it.

HENRIETTA

Oh, Dolores! I don't want to lose you.

DOLORES

Hey, we've still got a year. Save that.

HENRIETTA

We could have stayed in business together. As partners.

DOLORES

It's still doable. From the coast. Isn't it?

HENRIETTA

Y' know . . . perhaps it is! Why didn't I think of that?

DOLORES

Let's talk about it.

HENRIETTA

Let's!

(She finishes the drink)

DOLORES

Gotta go. Need to prep for a client.

HENRIETTA

Mr. Wilkes, I think, isn't it?

DOLORES

Yep. My *Ashley*.

HENRIETTA

In that case – scoot!

(Dolores rises)

Dolores . . . listen, I'm sorry to keep tossing this in your face, honey, but . . . exactly how deep does the cop have his claws in you?

(Dolores scoffs)

I'm sorry, but this thing with him bothers me.

DOLORES

I can't break it off.

HENRIETTA

Right! You're passed that now. Of course. And no doubt he knows the extent of your business.

DOLORES

You mean my clients?

HENRIETTA

As well as who you work for.

DOLORES

Henrietta . . .

HENRIETTA

A lot of people, to get cake in the sky aren't above eating a little shit.

DOLORES

What are you saying?

HENRIETTA

That I've done time in jail. In Houston, I suffered the same fate as the Peachtree Street Madam. Three girls with whom I'd literally scraped from the street, then turned into goddesses turned on me under pressure from the police. One

accepted a reduced sentence, the remaining two walked.

DOLORES

How long have we known each other?

HENRIETTA

When push comes to shove, none of that means a goddamned thing.

DOLORES

So, to protect yourself and your interests, you'll have me and the cop whacked?

HENRIETTA

Oh, Dolores . . . !

DOLORES

I'm out of this town in a year, Ms. Dawkins. At which time, everything I have in this agency goes with me. And as for anything resembling a partnership . . . stuff that up your ass during your next electric dildo session.

(She exits. Blackout on Henrietta)

(Lights rise in Dolores' condo. Then lights rise in the dining room of Jake and Solea. They sit at either ends of the table, staring at one another. Solea holds a knife. After a moment, Jake rises and looks toward the condo. Dolores enters in a sheer, see-through jump suit and high-heeled slippers. Both Jake and Solea notice)

JAKE

My daddy was a fortunate man. An intelligent man of business. Debonair. Well-versed. And the damnedest lady's man I'd ever seen. To think that the old bastard lived and died without ever wanting for a woman. I never knew what the trick was, I never came to see how he managed it, but he could always call upon some lovely, nubile animal hidden in some illicit corner to ease his male exigencies. Someone other than mother, whom I believe he'd come to find slightly repulsive over time.

I guess he was one man who knew how to get what he wanted.

(Jake steps away from the table and into Dolores' condo, then into her arms. Solea sets down the knife)

SOLEA

What impressed me upon meeting my future husband were his courtly ways.

(Jake kisses, caresses Dolores. Solea watches)

I'd been put off by the fact that he was so completely full of himself. However, those southern manners, his decorum, the way it seasoned his speech like grace notes on sheet music, could only win me over. The son of a bitch would even descend to a knee in asking for my hand.

(Fade on Solea and the dining room)

JAKE

I could kill a man just for one shot at fucking you?

DOLORES

Killing someone to fuck me. Is that supposed to get me hot?

JAKE

It'd get a rise outta me.

DOLORES

Mierda!

JAKE

Don't give me that. You'd want it and like it.

DOLORES

And just what kind of girl do you think I am?

JAKE

The type who loves danger.

DOLORES

Honey, if I wanted to live dangerously –

JAKE

You'd sell it on the street?

DOLORES

No. I'd be your wife.

JAKE

Oh, shut up . . .

(With forceful abruptness, he takes her into his arms)

This cloak-and-dagger bullshit has worn out its welcome. I think it's time I knew your real name.

DOLORES

You were the one who insisted on it being this way.

JAKE

Now, it seems I've known you long enough to get everything else.

DOLORES

Sweetheart, you're getting everything else! Hey! Slow down!

JAKE

You're being eaten alive, dammit! Now keep still . . .

DOLORES

Ashley! . . . Mr. Wilkes, please. Save some for dessert. Okay?

JAKE

And, Lord knows, I am a man who loves his sugar.

(Another kiss)

DOLORES

When are we leaving for Florida?

JAKE

A fortnight from today.

DOLORES

The whole weekend?

JAKE

We leave Friday morning, we're back Monday night.

DOLORES

The Keys?

JAKE

At the family cottage, yep!

DOLORES

Oh! You're so good to me! I can't wait!

(Jake is laughing)

What?

JAKE

Ashley Wilkes?

DOLORES

It was either that, or Rhett Butler.

JAKE

Which would make you . . . who, now? Mammy?

(Dolores playfully hits him and pushes him on the couch)

DOLORES

One of these days, I'm gonna kick your white southern ass to Boston.

JAKE

Oh, come on, now. Kiss me again.

(She does so, slowly and sensually)

You'll love the Keys.

DOLORES

I may not want to come back.

JAKE

Well . . . if you find that you like it and if it's good to you . . . I could manage a place there for you.

DOLORES

I'd like that.

JAKE

As long as it remains within the realm of business, correct?

DOLORES

You're more of a grown up than I thought.

(As they kiss and embrace, Jake manages to pull off her gown)

JAKE

If that's what you want . . . I'll be as grown up as tree.

DOLORES

A very erect, *hardwood* tree, *Mr. Wilkes*.

(They laugh)

JAKE

I'm gonna look back on all of this someday when I'm old, when I'd been so afraid of . . . of everything, really. I'm gonna look back and laugh – right through my undershorts.

DOLORES

You're not afraid of everything. What scares you is losing everything. Right?

JAKE

If it should come out that mothers only child engaged in an illicit affair with a dark woman of the night, oh yes! The umbilical cord would be sliced off at the root, leaving poor *Mr. Wilkes* to drift in space. My character has been sullied indelibly from a past sin. And, for that, mother says I must prove myself. My God! The old bitch can be such an Inquisitor!

DOLORES

Hence the need for the *nom de plumes*.

JAKE

Nightshade. Do you like that?

DOLORES

Yeah. I do.

(A kiss)

JAKE

What's more, if I am to someday pocket the family wealth, I must somehow convince my little wife to submit to the bearing of children. This would please mother. And assure her of my ability to run the family enterprise.

If I could only dissuade the little bitch from her futile attempts at painting, maybe –

DOLORES

Your wife . . . ?

JAKE

Yes. She's an artist. At least, she convinces herself of such.

(Another kiss)

Now – say *fuck me* in French.

DOLORES

Baise-moi!

JAKE

Say it in Spanish . . .

DOLORES

Follame!

JAKE

Italiano.

DOLORES

Cazzo a me!

JAKE

Sprichst du Deutsch?

DOLORES

Fick dich selber.

(She kisses him)

JAKE

Did you just tell me to fuck myself?

(Dolores laughs and rises, then slips back into the gown)

DOLORES

Nightshade. Jake's idea. On their estate, there'd been a little plot where his

mother raised belladonna – *nightshade*. Jake recalls that the flowers were quite beautiful, yet poisonous. A deadly temptation. As he saw me.

That weekend, at the cottage, there was a painting which hung in the bedroom. Above the bed. In the bottom right-hand corner was the signature of the artist.

(Jake rises and begins removing his clothes)

JAKE

That piece of shit was done by my little wife.

(Dolores is shaken)

It's supposed to be my portrait, a birthday gift. Every so often, she'll darken this place with her presence. And I keep that here to assuage her delicate little feelings.

(He is now stripped to his underwear. He embraces Dolores. She is unresponsive)

What the hell's wrong with you? Did you just die?

DOLORES

I'm tired.

JAKE

Of what? Me?

DOLORES

No, honey . . .

JAKE

Don't *honey* me, goddammit! Now what's the problem? Are you sick?

DOLORES

I didn't bother to dress. I ran out, to the beach, and into the water . . . swimming out as far as I could . . . until my strength was gone.

JAKE

What's the matter? Is it me?

DOLORES

All I could think was . . . *how could I tell Solea?*

JAKE

What did I do?

DOLORES

Or how would I keep this from her?

JAKE

Hey!

DOLORES

Or perhaps . . . perhaps one of us would have to kill the nettlesome spouse after all.

(Lights fade on Dolores)

JAKE

Hey! You owe me, goddammit! YOU OWE ME!

(Fade on Jake)

(Lights rise in Solea's studio. Darla is reclined and posing in the nude. Solea works from her easel. Darla speaks with a Cuban accent)

DARLA

And you don't mind, really, if I talk?

SOLEA

Truth is I prefer it. I never want my subjects to feel like they're posing. I want them to feel as relaxed, as comfortable as they can. If you need to move, please, do so. But slightly.

DARLA

What if I smoke?

SOLEA

I'd be happy to add an unlit cigarette in the picture, but –

(Darla laughs)

DARLA

It is alright, darling. We must draw the line somewhere.

SOLEA

Sorry, but I don't like smoke. Except when I'm cooking.

DARLA

What time is it?

SOLEA

Almost four. You wanna stop for the day?

DARLA

I think I have to. I have guests tonight.

SOLEA

No worries. We'll pick up where we left off tomorrow. Same time?

DARLA

One PM – yes.

(Darla rises and begins to dress. Solea is still at the easel)

SOLEA

Come. Take a look.

DARLA

Oh, no. I prefer to see when it is finished.

SOLEA

Are you sure? I mean . . .

DARLA

I trust you, dear.

(Fully dressed, Darla notices the bottle of Cabernet and the glasses set nearby)

Do you mind?

SOLEA

Oh, not at all – please.

(Darla pours herself a glass)

In fact, have a glass before we begin the next session.

DARLA

My! You are so unconventional.

SOLEA

Which, ultimately, contributes to a more vibrant picture.

DARLA

I can't wait.

(Darla gazes out the vast window)

Your home is so wonderful. I love it!

SOLEA

Oh, thank you. Y' know, as an artist, I'd always been set on living and working in New York. Then I met Jake. And as you're aware, his history and his family and his money are planted hip-deep in this town. And nothing short of the second coming will uproot him. When I agreed to marry him, I insisted on a house in downtown Atlanta. I'm a Georgia girl, but –

DARLA

Not small town, small time.

SOLEA

And, most certainly, not *country*. Urbanization and culture are as essential to my sanity as love, breath and chocolate.

(Darla laughs)

He was good about it and found this two-story monstrosity.

DARLA

You should be happy!

SOLEA

With a tricked-out studio.

(She gestures, indicating her spacious art studio)

DARLA

Everything you need for your work. And again – you should be happy!

SOLEA

Thanks, but . . . these days, I'd prefer to be sane.

(Silence. With a remote, Solea turns on music)

DARLA

I am surprised to see no paintings of you and him.

SOLEA

There's a portrait of him hanging in the family cottage in the Keys. Jake doesn't like it, though.

DARLA

Oh?

SOLEA

I'm what you would call a neo-expressionist. His view of art, on the other hand, is more classical.

DARLA

I see. Conservative.

SOLEA

Like his politics.

DARLA

Ugh!

(They laugh)

SOLEA

Y' know, I think I'll have a glass myself.

DARLA

Let me.

(She does so, then hands it to Solea)

SOLEA

Thank you.

(Silence. Darla takes note of a song that's playing, which is slow and sensual)

DARLA
 Hmm! I love this song.

SOLEA
 Oh, yes! Me, too.

DARLA
 A perfect song to dance slow –

SOLEA
 With the perfect lover.

DARLA
 Or spouse.

SOLEA
 Sure. Jake’s no dancer, though. He hates it, in fact.

DARLA
You’re kidding?

SOLEA
 Nope.

DARLA
 That’s a shame. My poppy would say that the perfect man for any woman is one who showers twice a day . . . and who knows how to dance.

(They laugh)

SOLEA
 Well, Jake’s certainly a clean freak. So, he’s got half of it beaten.

(Silence. Then, Darla sets down her glass, takes the glass from Solea, and offers to dance with her)

Are you asking me to dance?

DARLA
 We both like the song. Why not?

SOLEA
 I thought you had to leave?

I think my guests can wait. Come.

DARLA

(Solea hesitates, then engages Darla in the dance. The women giggle, in spite of themselves)

Whooh!

SOLEA

Are you alright?

DARLA

Oh, I'm fine. I just felt a rush of wine go to my head.

SOLEA

You're having fun.

DARLA

(The song ends, and an up-tempo danceable tune plays. Darla leads Solea into a sort of tango. They dance and move in this way throughout the song, then finish with Solea being taken into Darla's arms with great flourish. Darla then abruptly brings her up and kisses her lips as the song ends. Solea breaks the kiss and slaps her, then turns off the music with the remote)

I think . . . I think you should see to your guests.

SOLEA

I am . . . I'm sorry –

DARLA

Please leave.

SOLEA

(Darla takes up her bag, then stops)

Jake and I have been working together for a long time.

DARLA

SOLEA

So?

DARLA

It's just that . . . I've been around him . . . *a long time.*

SOLEA

You've been at the bank for a year. I don't consider that a long time.

DARLA

It is long enough.

SOLEA

For what? To screw around?

DARLA

I could never sleep with Jake.

SOLEA

However, you owe him a lot, don't you? When you high-tailed it out of Cuba you had nothing. Not even a rag to wipe your nose. Jake brought you from Texas to Georgia, helped finance your education . . .

DARLA

I would never fuck around with Jake.

SOLEA

Well, I'm sorry, but my store's not open, either.

DARLA

Right. And I am sorry.

(Silence)

I suppose you have knowledge of what your husband is doing?

SOLEA

I'm not stupid.

DARLA

No, but you are unhappy.

SOLEA

Darla, you're not an analyst. Okay? Now, if you don't mind –

I want to help you.

DARLA

Help me?

SOLEA

Yes. You see . . . the woman Jake has been seeing –

DARLA

I don't want to know.

SOLEA

Solea –

DARLA

I don't care, Darla. I do not need further briefing on my so-called husbands screwing partner. Besides, in a year, I'm leaving the bastard.

SOLEA

Oh.

DARLA

And why in the hell did I tell that? Look, about this commission . . .

SOLEA

I would like for us to continue –

DARLA

And I appreciate it, but . . . Darla, right now, you've made me very uncomfortable.

SOLEA

That was not my intention –

DARLA

Well, just the same . . . I'm willing to write off the time that was invested –

SOLEA

I'll pay more.

DARLA

I won't accept it –

SOLEA

Please! DARLA

 No. And that is final. SOLEA

 Your husbands lover . . . *you know who she is.* DARLA

 What? SOLEA

 The woman Jake is fucking . . . is someone you know. DARLA

 You don't say? SOLEA

 Solea, this is not funny. DARLA

 You're damned right, it isn't. SOLEA

 In fact, it will hurt you more. DARLA

 Then, do me a favor, huh? Keep it to yourself – SOLEA

 I fell in love with you, Solea . . . when I met you at the Christmas party last year. DARLA
 You haunt my thoughts.

(Silence. Solea pours a glassful of wine
and drinks it down)

 Who is Jake seeing? SOLEA

 Whatever happens, you will have a home in someone's heart to go to. DARLA

SOLEA

Who is it, Darla?

DARLA

I would pray for blindness rather than see you hurt –

SOLEA

Answer my question, or – goddammit – I’ll kill you!

DARLA

She works for an escort agency. Which is run by an English woman. The woman . . . she is – she is a black, no – an African American woman.

Yes. She is your lover too, no?

SOLEA

You’re lying.

DARLA

Solea –

SOLEA

YOU’RE LYING!!!

DARLA

If only I were.

(Solea pours and downs another full glass of wine)

Last month, I went to Miami on business. With Jake and a few other associates. At a nightclub, I saw Jake dancing . . . yes, *dancing*, with a woman. As we were leaving, I noticed Jake was going, too. With the woman. They got into a limousine . . . and went away.

When we got back to Atlanta, I shared an airport limousine with Jake and . . . and the woman. Jake was drunk. We dropped them both off at her condo downtown. To which Jake said there’d be thirty-thousand-dollars waiting to be directly deposited into my account if I would forget what I saw.

If the idiot hadn’t been so drunk, I wouldn’t have had to forget anything. He would have taken time to . . . not be so sloppy, I suppose.

He’s going to the Keys in Florida this weekend.

SOLEA

The family cottage.

DARLA

And he's bringing her with him.

SOLEA

And where did you hear this?

DARLA

He told me directly. Since that night, he talks to me about his business. We've become *amigos del alma*, I guess.

SOLEA

Sure. But what makes you think there's anything sexual between this woman and me? And why should I give a tortured fuck about some black bitch who screws my husband, anyway?

DARLA

Do not do this to yourself.

SOLEA

Fuck you, Darla!

(Darla moves to the exit, then stops)

DARLA

Last week, I stopped by for our session. I had forgotten that the date was moved up. You were not home, so I sat in the car and waited. After thirty minutes, she . . . and you . . . drove up. The two of you jumped from the car, so happy. And at the front door you kissed and touched as only lovers will do.

I smiled to myself. Yet, because I knew the . . . the circumstances, I started to cry. I feared this would destroy you, my love. The reason for the commission in the first place was for me to do something to get as close to you as possible. And let you know my heart. Now, I want to do what I can to save you.

(Darla exits. Solea goes back to the wine. She is about to pour another glass when she suddenly clutches her stomach, then runs to the sink and vomits. After a moment, she weeps.

Lights rise on Dolores and Jake in limbo. Solea watches as they dance close to the same tune as she and Darla had moments ago. Jake is drunk. Dolores laughs. Jake breaks suddenly from Dolores and dances freestyle until he trips on his feet and falls.

Dolores laughs hysterically)

(Blackout)

(Lights rise in Solea's studio. It is night. We hear thunder, rainfall. Darla enters, wet from the rain, and finds Solea drinking from a second bottle of Cabernet, drunk and an emotional wreck)

DARLA

Oh, baby!

(Solea breaks down. Darla takes her in her arms and tries to comfort her)

It's fine. It's all fine, my love. You are with me. Now, hush. Shh . . .

(After a few moments, Solea breaks the embrace)

SOLEA

Thank you for coming.

DARLA

It's okay.

(She shows Darla the finished painting)

SOLEA

I took it upon myself to finish it. From memory.

(Darla admires the piece)

DARLA

It is more lovely than I could ever have imagined.

SOLEA

I went to her condo and waited at the front door. I even rang the doorbell. But I couldn't bring myself to face her. When she came to the door, I hid. In the shadows. And I nearly lost it when I heard Jakes voice. I ran out and sat in the car and watched them leave. They got into an airport limousine. They were laughing. As if the two of them knew what I now know. And the joke was on me!

Could she ever fall for a man like Jake?

DARLA

I can't see how any woman could stomach someone like Jake. Let alone fall for him.

SOLEA

I did. Which makes me a fool. Doesn't it?

DARLA

No. Stop.

SOLEA

Or, perhaps . . . perhaps it's just business as far as she's concerned. And I shouldn't worry. On the other hand . . . if I confront her about it, she'll lie. I mean, that's usually how it goes, right? I'll ask her about it. She'll feign ignorance. Then lie. And I'll be hurt. And angry. Not so much for the fact that she's fucking the man whom she knows is my husband, but for lying to me. And for that . . . *I'll have to kill her.*

DARLA

What? Solea!

SOLEA

And Jake, too!

DARLA

Do you hear yourself? What you are saying . . . ?

SOLEA

You're all that's left in my life that doesn't hurt, Darla. Your memory does not yet bring pain. This is why you're here.

DARLA

Thank you, my love, but . . . you should speak to her first.

SOLEA

But if she lies, I swear – I'll kill her.

DARLA

Think about what you say!

SOLEA

I can't risk her falling for him. Jake is motherfucker! But I'll be goddamned if

he doesn't have a way about him. I fell for it. And I look at you . . . I look at you and in spite of the fact that you'll deny it . . . I'll bet you nearly jumped feet-first over to his side of the fence, too. Isn't that right?

(Music rises and Jakes enters. He takes Darla in his arms. They begin to dance)

JAKE

Do you miss Cuba?

DARLA

Not at all.

JAKE

That's good to hear.

(Jake moves in closer. Darla is uncomfortable)

DARLA

May I ask you a personal question?

JAKE

Perhaps.

DARLA

Are you married?

JAKE

What do you have in mind?

DARLA

Nothing. Nothing at all . . .

JAKE

What plans do you have for the weekend?

DARLA

Excuse me?

JAKE

We have a lovely cottage in the Florida Keys. I'd take you there. This weekend.

No. I don't think –

DARLA

All expenses paid.

JAKE

Jake, I'm sorry, but . . .

DARLA

How 'bout dinner? Tomorrow night?

JAKE

(She breaks from Jake)

No. No. I . . . I can't.

DARLA

What's the problem? It's true, isn't it? . . . That you don't like men?

JAKE

You asshole!

DARLA

Watch what you say to me. I brought your *oye* ass over here. And I can sure as shit send it back. Now what d'ya say 'bout tomorrow night?

JAKE

Fuck off.

DARLA

(Jake shakes his head and exits. Music fades)

Don't lie to me!

SOLEA

Solea, you know what I'm about.

DARLA

Does Jake know it?

SOLEA

What does it matter?

DARLA

(Jake appears in US limbo)

JAKE

You know, Solea . . . I haven't said this to many women. My God, I don't recall the need to utter such words to my very own mama –

SOLEA

What is it?

(He descends to a knee)

JAKE

I . . . I love you, Solea.

SOLEA

Don't bullshit me!

JAKE

Baby, I'm telling you, it's real.

SOLEA

How would you know what it is if you've never felt it?

(He takes both her hands and places them on his heart)

JAKE

I feel this! I have no idea as to what it is, but . . . you – you've conjured something in my life and in my heart, my darling. And if you shut me out . . . I will surely die.

SOLEA

And we can't have that, can we?

(He removes a belladonna flower from his jacket lapel. He hands it to Solea. She takes it)

JAKE

Marry me. Be with me. Or I'll die. I will die, Solea. I'll die . . .

(He rises and exits)

SOLEA

That sonofabitch, he's got a way about him. And I went for it.

(Solea weeps. Then, silence)

I swear on my blood, Darla . . . if she lies . . . I will kill her. I'll kill her! And Jake, too.

DARLA

You'll kill them both?

SOLEA

Yes. I will.

DARLA

And then yourself? Right?

(Silence)

Solea?

(Silence. Solea stares at the flower in her hand. Lights fade. End Act One)

ACT TWO

(Lights rise in Dolores' condo. She enters dressed provocatively and answers her phone)

DOLORES

Hello?

(Lights rise on Henrietta in US limbo on her phone. She wears dark glasses and a hat)

HENRIETTA

You're in trouble. If you've got a client, if you have anything planned, cancel. And get out of town.

DOLORES

Why?

HENRIETTA

We're about to be hit. By the FBI. There's been an investigation which no one knew of. They've been spying on us for months.

DOLORES

Shit.

HENRIETTA

And no doubt your cop friend will sing like a sparrow to save his ass, if you can catch my meaning.

DOLORES

Yeah. He will.

HENRIETTA

Whatever your little plan was, now's a good time to implement it.

DOLORES

Right.

HENRIETTA

Speaking of which, Dolores . . . my assets, bank accounts . . . everything's frozen. Which is the other reason as to why I called: honey, I need your help.

DOLORES

But I'm under the proverbial gun, too.

HENRIETTA

I . . . I know.

(Silence)

DOLORES

Henrietta . . . Listen, I . . . What I said to you the other day . . . I'm sorry. That was wrong –

HENRIETTA

Oh, forget about all that. We say lots of things we'd be ashamed of in that hot moment just before we cum.

(They laugh tentatively. Then silence)

DOLORES

I've got a stash. I'll split that with you. I can get you a hundred grand. Will that help?

HENRIETTA

It will have to.

DOLORES

Is there someplace we can meet?

HENRIETTA

A friend of mine has a plane. And a house in Costa Rica, off the track. We're leaving from a private airport just outside Smyrna.

DOLORES

I'll get there. What time?

HENRIETTA

Midnight.

DOLORES

I'll be there with the money.

HENRIETTA

In fact, why can't you come with us? There's room.

DOLORES

Thanks, but . . . I'll need to make other plans.

HENRIETA

With your lover. Right.

(Silence as Henrietta fights tears)

I won't forget you . . .

DOLORES

Hey, I'll see you at midnight. So, save that, huh.

(Fade on Henrietta. Dolores turns off the phone, collects her thoughts, then re-dials. Lights fade as she awaits for a response)

(Lights rise. The doorbell rings in Dolores' condo. She opens the door and the cop bursts in)

COP

You think you're smart, don't you?

(He hits her. Dolores falls to the floor)

I mean . . . it's one thing to be smart. But the fact that you think you're so smart that you could do-in a cop! A COP! That's just too much to take!

(He picks her up and hits her again. She falls on the sofa)

That's enough to piss off the goddamn Pope! And all the heavenly goddamned angels, at that!

(He strikes her again, then stops)

DOLORES

Are you done?

COP

Why? You enjoying this?

DOLORES

Let's say you aren't doing me any favors: I've been beaten up before.

(He scoffs, then tosses her a handkerchief)

And, by the way, I'm going down with the ship, too.

COP

Which made it fine and grand to leak my name to the *press*? After the FBI agreed not to disclose the names of those who were willing to cooperate? You'd do that?

DOLORES

Why not? Sure, the fucking FBI would agree to scratch your crotch, but they wouldn't deign to even sniff mine, now, would they?

COP

Be that as it may, because of you my mother, my wife, everyone at church . . . Sweet Jesus! They'll hear about this.

DOLORES

Oh, don't be so dramatic. They'll deal with it, or they won't. Besides, not one among us is guiltless.

COP

But not many of us are fucked, are we?

(He pours himself a glass of Cabernet, then drinks)

The fucking FBI . . . y' know they've been investigating us for about a year now? According to the information that's been obtained Vice and Bunko are at the center of it all. Everything's about to be shaken up.

DOLORES

What, if I may ask, did you tell them?

COP

More than you think.

DOLORES

Are saying, all this time –

COP

Do you think I'd ingratiate you with my presence and hard-earned money if I didn't know what I was stepping in? Like, for starters, your client list. And that "Of Mice and Men" dreamlife you're planning to start in Monterey? . . . About building that house on land you've already bought?

DOLORES

You motherfucker!

COP

Yeah. It comes with being a cop – being a motherfucker who knows what people are doing out of sight and out of mind.

DOLORES

And, I suppose, if you cooperate, the Feds will grease you down before they fuck you? Right?

(Silence. He pours himself another glass of Cabernet)

Where does that leave me?

COP

With nothing. I'm putting a lot on the line in being here. And the showdown occurs at high noon. If you can decipher my meaning.

DOLORES

I don't have a lot of time.

COP

Where will you go?

DOLORES

I don't know. Maybe . . . maybe out of the country.

COP

Don't go to Brazil. I don't care if you speak the language. Don't go to Venezuela, either. It's a shithole now. Instead . . . well, how's your French?

DOLORES

Au dessus de la moyenne.

COP

If you can swing it, go to France where they won't extradite you. If you've gotta

passport, I know somebody who can set you up with a Visa. And move it before they freeze your accounts. Like they just did to your boss.

Meantime, I'm gonna try to get back onto greener pastures with my wife. This run-in with the Feds . . . I guess it all shook me up. And helped me to see how tenuous it all is. As for this little rendezvous between you and me . . . the truth is, I never felt good about it. None of it had anything to do with you. I was, well . . . I simply wasn't proud of it.

(He downs the rest of the wine and sets the glass down)

And I'm – I'm sorry I got so rough. Would you believe I never hit a woman in my life before now? I don't know. I guess . . . I guess something got to me.

(He exits as lights rise in the home of Jake and Solea, who are seated at the dinner table)

SOLEA

Don't lie, baby. Please! Don't lie.

(Dolores rises and joins them)

DOLORES

It was business, Solea, Besides, I didn't get wind of it until –

(Lights fade in her condo)

SOLEA

Until when, Dolores? Tell me – WHEN! How many fucks did it take to get you to finally come around?

JAKE

Yeah. How much spunk did you wipe off your face before you saw the light?

DOLORES

Fuck *you*, Jake.

JAKES

For free this time, I'm sure.

DOLORES

This changes nothing between us. I swear, it doesn't. I love you, Solea.

SOLEA

No! You can't just say it.

DOLORES

Baby . . .

SOLEA

I need to know. I need to be sure.

DOLORES

Neither of us knew the others name. So how could I have known?

SOLEA

How could you *not* know?

JAKE

For once in your miserable life, Solea, stop being naïve?

DOLORES

I love you, Solea. In fact, I was willing to do anything, to go to any extreme, to keep this from you.

SOLEA

You mean lie?

DOLORES

I mean kill the nettlesome motherfucker!

(Jake laughs)

You see, your husbands problem is that he talks too much. And once I became aware of the circumstances, I didn't care, I didn't give a shit. I was primed to kill his ass. I want you, baby. I love you . . . and I want you. And I'd kill for that.

(Dolores gently takes the knife, then very tenderly kisses Solea)

JAKE

Oh, please! Stop it! NO! Don't do that in my house! Not in front of me . . .

DOLORES

We're in love, Mr. Wilkes. Deal with it.

SOLEA

And I want a divorce. Or else!

JAKE

Or else *what?* Neither of you scare me one inch. You see, I don't give a shit either. Say what you want, make all the veiled threats that come into your head. I will not divorce you. So go fuck yourselves – just not in my house.

DOLORES

Tell her, Jake.

SOLEA

What?

DOLORES

Six years of bad marriage and non-existent sex has now faded with the Georgia sunset. Which means it's time you had a talk with your wife.

SOLEA

About what?

JAKE

Nothing. In fact, the party's over. And I'm tired.

SOLEA

Is there something you need to tell me?

JAKE

I'm not arguing about this, Solea.

SOLEA

Is it your family? Is it . . . *it is your mother?*

JAKE

I've had enough of this –

SOLEA

There *was* more to this story. It's your goddamned mother, isn't it?

JAKE

You watch what comes out of your mouth when you refer to family. In fact, perhaps I should give you what you want and file for a divorce. Once I inform mother as to the circumstances – that her sons wife has been ducking into dark corners with another woman – a *black* woman – once she gets wind of that juicy

bon mot, why, I'll bet a king's ransom that she'll even foot the bill for the attorney's fees.

SOLEA

You won't give me a divorce for fear of your mother?

JAKE

I'm done talking. And leave my mother be, dammit!

SOLEA

You didn't want your wife to know what your whore had full knowledge of: that her husband is scared of his mama.

JAKE

And take a good, long look at what I gave you, in spite of all that. Such as where you live, the clothes you wear, the food you gormandize and the wine you guzzle like a washed up lush. You'd be on bohemian skid-row if it weren't for me. Think of the name you have. Take a while and give thought to where you would be if I hadn't stooped and done you the begrudging favor of marrying your sorry ass.

SOLEA

And that marriage is dead. Let me go. Finish it.

JAKE

I'm telling you *I can't*.

SOLEA

If you want, I'll speak to your mother and tell her that the decision to separate was mutual. And that it had nothing to do with –

JAKE

No, you . . . It doesn't work that way.

SOLEA

Your mother is an adult. Believe me, she'll get it.

JAKE

No! She's a sick, old harpy who doesn't get anything. And you know it.

DOLORES

How sick is she?

JAKE

What's it to you?

DOLORES

Well, it seems that I do have a vested interest. And if the old dowager is sick, then it stands to reason that she can't possibly have a lot of fuel in the tank. Which means she's probably running on fumes.

JAKE

What are you saying? That we should sit around and wait for the shoe to drop?

DOLORES

Or, if we wish to avoid the waiting game, we can . . . make an arrangement.

SOLEA

Take her out of her misery, in other words?

DOLORES

Or just . . . *take her out.*

JAKE

I am not going to kill my mother!

SOLEA

Then you better find a way to cut her loose, baby. Or I will.

JAKE

You're serious?

SOLEA

I've got plans for my life. I want to be happy and spend my life with someone I love.

JAKE

With all I've given you—

SOLEA

OH, FUCK THAT! Jake, I want to know what contentment is. I want to know what it's like to make love and feel good when it's over as opposed to simply having accommodated my spouse.

JAKE

Accommodate? You can't even fake it.

SOLEA

And do you have any idea how that feels? To not have the wherewithal to fake it anymore? Do you know what it's like to begin to hate everything associated with sex? Have you ever dreaded it? Did the mere thought of fucking your own spouse make you so sick that you'd cook up any crazy excuse to get out of it? Only to be cornered, and even after drinking yourself into a near stupor, to still not be numb enough to get yourself through it?

JAKE

I'm that bad? Is that it?

SOLEA

Oh, JAKE!

JAKE

Let me tell you something, Miss: if this marriage is fucked you had a hand in it, too. That's right. If I'm knee deep in shit, you, my dear, are in it up to your neck.

SOLEA

We finally know where we stand, in other words. Is that it?

JAKE

I think we knew it from the start.

SOLEA

Then whatever it is you want from me you ought to know that I cannot give it. I can't help you.

JAKE

But you sure as shit can help yourself.

DOLORES

You sure as shit did.

JAKE

Why don't you get the hell out of here?

DOLORES

I think I will –

SOLEA

No, please! Don't leave me!

JAKE

She may as well, 'cause you're not going anywhere. And I will not divorce you. It's as simple as that. Now . . . I am willing, however, to be reasonable and allow the two of you to . . . see each other from time to time. Go on and have your little thing between yourselves. Only . . . make sure it's kept *between yourselves*. This can't get back to mama. I'm a dead man if she should uncover it.

DOLORES

And will you be jumping into bed with your wife and I during your off-hours?

JAKE

Just keep her happy. That's your job. And you'll continue to be paid.

SOLEA

You're a sick man, Jake.

JAKE

Be grateful you're getting as much, bitch.

SOLEA

If all the money and the courting of mama's favor was so damned crucial to your survival, why screw around in the first place?

JAKE

I . . . I don't know. I guess for a man, it's . . . it's complicated.

SOLEA

I wouldn't understand, in other words?

JAKE

Alright, I screw around because – like my daddy – *I'm a man!* Daddy, by nature, was a hunter. And I'm just like him. Now! Does that answer your question?

(Dolores laughs)

Anyway, there's no need to spin myself into butter attempting to justify or explain it. Let's just deal with the situation as it stands.

DOLORES

Which is Jake attempting to prove to his mother and, mostly, to himself that he's this *man* he talks of.

JAKE

Like you never had to prove yourself.

DOLORES

I never saw the need to.

JAKE

Well, for your information, with old money, old institutions, old reputations . . . let's just say it calls for a different kind of protocol.

SOLEA

In other words, you're a *slave*.

(Jake begins to react, then considers)

JAKE

And my family, my ancestors . . . they owned slaves. So, yeah, you're right, sweetheart: like banking and finance, we know all about the slaving game, too. And the many shapes and forms it can take.

The truth is that I'd never been swept away by you, Solea. I simply could not place you as a woman capable of driving a man passionately crazy. You seemed too settled into yourself for that to happen. And which, ironically, was what I needed at the time we met.

Alright. To answer your question . . . yes. There *was* more to the story all along.

Monica Stanton. I'd known her since childhood. Her father was one within a long line of attorneys who'd practiced law since the Antebellum South. Our courtship had been long. From childhood to adulthood, thrown together by money, privilege . . . and obligation. I must confess to liking her and enjoying her company a lot more when we'd been children. With adulthood, I'd soon become aware of commitment, responsibility, and the importance of legacy. Consequently, over time, I cared less for her. Yet, I could not so much as entertain the thought of backing out of a marriage. If such an unspeakable action had occurred on my part, even if God in His mercy would decline in renditioning me to hell, my mother would override the Almighty Himself and cast my white ass into torment!

No expense was spared for the wedding, a beautiful ceremony outdoors. At the reception, I drank more than should have been allowed. I started to flirt with a guest, a woman whom I hadn't known well. She flirted back. Before either of us could negotiate our next step, we stole to a private place and necked like two carnal serpents. She gave me the repellent idea of inviting herself to bed with me and Monica. And being the drunken mess that I'd become, dragging the woman at my side, I broached the question to my new wife. To say that she was disgusted would be the understatement of a lifetime.

We couldn't even make love on our wedding night it had so affected her. I thought I'd make amends on our honeymoon in the Caribbean. It was not to be. At the hotel, the unforgiving wench demanded separate rooms.

The marriage gasped for breath through four months. She finally kicked it dead. And divorced me.

DOLORES

Okay. You got out of a forced marriage.

JAKE

Yet, into something far more dreadful with mother. Father, who'd been alive at the time, refused to so much as comment on the matter, for obvious reasons.

SOLEA

Like you'd said, you take after him.

JAKE

If you mean I suffer the same curse, yes. In fact, as old as he was, the man was still virile enough for *two* mistresses – one here in Atlanta, another up in Athens. Mother was aware. And it was hard on her, but she tolerated it. As for my fuck up, well . . . father weathered it as the man he was. Then even went as far as to forgive me. When the old man died, though, I found myself at the mercy of his alter-ego, the matriarch. I was as sure and as foolish as a son could be that my father had willed the family fortune to his only heir. Something such as that was simply in the stars. I remain ignorant as to how she pulled it off, but the depraved bitch had everything, the whole of it, dropped securely between her sagging bosom. Everything! With not a farthing thrown in my direction. Oh, I've got a position. Sure! I've got that bone to chew on. Yet, the throne has been withheld. Until such time as mother sees that I am . . . *man* enough to commit myself to *preserving the lineage*. That's right. Though she doesn't quite cotton to you, Solea, she still desires grandchildren. And in her worldview, if a man is incapable of laying such a foundation, he surely is unprepared to govern a financial enterprise.

SOLEA

Grandchildren? Is that what you said?

JAKE

I'm sorry, baby, but –

SOLEA

No!

JAKE

This is what I've been holding back. And I've put it off for too long. My life is at stake, dammit!

SOLEA

I will not bear your child. I will cut my throat before I so much as consider it.

JAKE

Alright, I'll give you about a month to get your head wrapped around it –

DOLORES

She's made her decision . . .

JAKE

No, I've made mine!

SOLEA

And I won't let you carry it out! Nothing short of flat-out rape will make me –

JAKE

Don't sweat it. We'll do *in vitro*.

SOLEA

MY ASS! You take your goddamn *in vitro* and choke on it!

JAKE

Look, I'll give you a month –

(She picks up the knife and advances toward Jake)

Good Lord, bitch! You've lost your mind!

SOLEA

That won't be all I've lost.

JAKE

Think about what you're doing . . .

DOLORES

Solea, baby –

SOLEA

This is for you and me! Stop trying to talk me out of it!

DOLORES

No! Honey, listen . . .

(She has backed Jake into a corner)

JAKE

NO – No – Come to think of it, leave her alone, Dolores. Leave her alone and watch. Let's see if she loves you enough to do it.

SOLEA

You dick-licking asshole! I HATE EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU!

JAKE

But how much love lives in that heart of yours? How often does it beat for your lover? How far are you willing to go? For love? What exactly are you capable of doing? I heard a woman say once that she'd kill for her newborn baby. What are you willing to do, Solea?

(Fighting her emotions, she sets the knife on the table)

SOLEA

Fuck you, Jake.

JAKE

Good. And I'll stay as such. As long as the thought of leaving is put to rest.

SOLEA

What if I refuse to concede? I'll say it again: there's no law that will make me stay married to you.

JAKE

And when has a goddamned law ever stopped anything or anybody?

SOLEA

Let me go, Jake –

JAKE

My pockets are arm deep. And my network covers a big room.

SOLEA

In other words . . .

JAKE

I'll never let you get away.

DOLORES

Next thing he'll say it's because he loves you.

JAKE

We're passed that.

DOLORES

I see. It's all been reduced to an –

JAKE

Obligation. Which supersedes everything. Even love. Now deal with it.

(Solea turns to Dolores)

SOLEA

Our house . . . the house we're going to build in Monterey –

DOLORES

We need to talk about that.

SOLEA

Why?

DOLORES

Baby . . . something's going down –

SOLEA

What is it?

DOLORES

I might have to leave the country.

SOLEA

Why? Can I come with you?

JAKE

That's unacceptable.

DOLORES

I don't know, baby –

JAKE

Besides, I forbid it.

SOLEA

You don't know? . . . What do you mean . . . ?

DOLORES

It's . . . Alright. A plane is waiting for us . . .

JAKE

Excuse me!

DOLORES

. . . Which means we have to leave now.

JAKE

Do I get a say?

DOLORES

You've had your say. Now, shut up.

JAKE

GODDAMMIT! I'M HER HUSBAND!

DOLORES

In that case . . . wanna get one last fuck in, Jake?

JAKE

What!?

DOLORES

Come on! Before we leave.

JAKE

No, I . . . This is not the time – NO! Besides, I'm not in the mood.

DOLORES

I can fix that.

(With the remote, Dolores puts on music, slow and sensuous. She then begins a strip tease)

JAKE

Stop.

DOLORES

Come on. Once more. Before I run off with your wife.

JAKE

She's not going anywhere.

DOLORES

I'd beg to differ.

(Her movements become more and more suggestive. She starts to peel out of her dress)

JAKE

I said stop. Put your clothes back on.

DOLORES

I can't believe you're not enjoying this.

SOLEA

I certainly am.

JAKE

Goddammit! Stop! Solea, don't look! I said STOP LOOKING!

(The dress comes off. Dolores is now beckoning Solea)

DOLORES

Come to me, sweetie. Dance with me.

SOLEA

You hear that? My lover wants me to go to her.

JAKE

NO! I mean . . . what about your husband?

DOLORES

Feel free to join in.

(Dolores is now nude. Solea has approached and is embracing and dancing with her)

JAKE

God, help me . . .

DOLORES

No, Jake. Help yourself. Your daddy sure would have.

(Very slowly, Jake breaks down and goes to the women. Dolores beckons Jake)

Jump in. The waters warm.

(He extends his hand to touch the women, then suddenly grasps his stomach. He moves away and begins to vomit. Dolores laughs and, with the remote, turns off the music. After a moment, he recovers)

JAKE

Solea . . . You won't get far.

SOLEA

We'll see.

JAKE

If you leave, I'll –

SOLEA

What?

JAKE

I'll . . . *I'll kill myself.* I will!

SOLEA

Oh, stop it. You can always find someone else to marry and bear your child.

JAKE

No. It's too late for that. I'm afraid with mama . . . I've simply run out of tomorrows. After all, she's the inquisitor. And I . . . I am but a tortured piece of flesh.

(He takes a belladonna flower from the vase, then takes up and conceals the knife)

Excuse me.

(He exits. Dolores slips back into her clothes)

DOLORES

My first encounter with the man who would be Jake was at a party.

(Darla appears in US limbo, dancing to a slow, haunting, sensuous tune)

My job was to entertain the male guests. Outside, by the pool, sat four drunken men playing Russian Roulette. With a real gun loaded with a live bullet.

(Solea notices Darla, then joins her in the dance)

They drank, laughed, slapped one another's backs, and passed the gun from hand to hand, each taking a turn at putting that cold weapon to their heads and pulling the trigger. I stood and watched, enjoying myself, in spite of it all.

(As they dance, they touch and kiss)

Jake looked up and noticed me when the gun was given to him. He cracked a drunken, demonic smile, then aimed. At me. I stood. Smiled back. And waited. He clenched the stem of a belladonna flower between his teeth . . . as he pressed down on the trigger with greater and greater firmness. Until the gun went off. The bullet breezing within inches by my head –

(Jake screams suddenly from offstage. The music stops. Sudden black out on Darla)

SOLEA

Sweet Jesus . . .

(Solea runs offstage in the direction of the scream)

DOLORES

Within three minutes . . . Jake and I were fucking like two possessed rabbits by the pool. And with this, I had drawn a complete assessment of him.

(Solea re-enters with blood on her clothes)

SOLEA

Which is what you've always been good at.

DOLORES

My profession demands it.

(Solea wavers. Dolores quickly catches her. She sits on the floor, cradling Solea)

SOLEA

He'd just gotten off of the phone with this mother. The knife was sticking out of his chest . . . and he was laughing. He said . . . he said he fixed us good. Me, you. *And mama*. He told me we'll never live this down. You'll tote it to the grave, he said. Just like an unwanted baby. And he laughed. And kept on laughing. Even . . . even dying in his laughter. Like some drunk . . . wallowing in his puke.

DOLORES

You'll be fine. You'll come with me. And it will be fine.

(Solea weeps)

SOLEA

Son of a bitch . . . That son of a bitch! He's always had a way about him. I fell for it. Again! And he got me.

DOLORES

Stop that, now. And hush. Everything's fine.

SOLEA

I . . . I can't. I don't –

DOLORES

The nettlesome spouse is dead. Now hush! Shh . . .

(Dolores is holding her tight. Solea is grasping the flower which Jake had taken in her hand as Dolores attempts to comfort her)

(Blackout)

(End of Play)

