

SCENE ONE

AT RISE:

Music: “Not Pretty Enough”; a slide of *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* is projected upstage; M. is seated in a captains chair center stage looking at it after lights up. He gets out of the chair, crosses upstage and stands near the screen; the image should be superimposed on him. He is sixty, casually dressed, shows his age. The song plays throughout the scene.

W. appears in the light of the projection upstage. She is the female equivalent of M. only better preserved.

You’re fucked, you know.

W.

I know.

M.

Does this help?

W.
(Points at *Folies-Bergère*.)

I don’t know. Yes. Maybe . . . It doesn’t hurt. I’m looking for . . . I’m lost, you know? I can’t . . .

W.

What.

He’s your man.

M.

Ah.

W.

I can’t go on, I’ll go on. And so on.

M.

W.

So.

M.

Jesus.

(Points at *Folies-Bergère*.)

Let's start again. A friend of ours wrote me and asked for a reason--just one reason. He sends that kind of thing all the time, so I wrote back and said maybe lunch is enough. On further thought I suggested that in some ideal world I'd get a chance to sleep with Suzon. Scholars think--

(Points at the Manet.)

--that's her name, though they're not sure. Not that it matters. And in my e-mail I didn't say I'd sleep with her--I'm cleaning it up for some reason. Protecting somebody.

(Turns back to the image.)

Pretending not to be the creep in the top hat with the mustache and soul patch . . . No, I didn't say sleep with her. Look at her . . . Sad? angry? lonely? frightened? sick of being there beneath that giant oculus, in the midst of distortion--sorry, got carried away. This isn't about Manet or Suzon. Or our friend's putative need for a reason.

(Turns back downstage.)

Flaubert had Canova, so why not--if I have lurid fantasies about fucking a picture, how many ways can I be wrong. But that's the subject, for better or worse: not painting, not Francophilia, certainly not high culture. Sex. Screwing. Fucking. I can dress it up anyway I want, but there it is. Sorry, there will be reminiscence--I'll try to keep it to a minimum, but the subject is sex.

Maybe not the subject of this particular picture, though some have argued--at the time the Parisian bourgeois figured Suzon had to be a prostitute, which was wrong--and God knows I'm not the first old man to fall in love--

W.

Love?

M.

She is--

W.

I know--

M.

--beautiful.

W.

--pissed off.

M.

That too.

(Pause.)

W.

She is beautiful.

M.

And before you get too angry at my infidelity, remember you're in love with Hamlet.

W.

Everybody's in love with Hamlet. So . . . What is this?

M.

What I'm working on. Recently.

W.

I didn't know you were working on anything.

M.

I am.

W.

About fucking. And painting. Manet. I heard.

M.

And me.

W.

Ah.

M.

Years ago. Many years ago. Women.

W.

That's not so clear.

M.

No. It started a few nights ago, at dinner.

W.

With your friend from school. You thought she was difficult. You said she wasn't always like that.

M.

When we got out of the cab, at the hotel she said, "I think we've remained handsome."
What's that. Three-quarters to dead.

W.

It's something people say. Most of what she says is deliberate. She was trying really hard.

M.

I know. And we've been friends since we were . . . Because of that, you know, I started
thinking about things. And I started working on it. Recently.

W.

You and her? I didn't know the two of you were ever a--

M.

It wasn't anything. It just got me thinking.

W.

About--

M.

You know--

W.

Ah. Women. From your youth. The girlfriends of forty years ago. Forty years--

M.

You asked me.

W.

I didn't, actually.

M.

Not exactly, but--

W.

TYour salad days. Forty years ago. Jesus.

M.

Longer.

W.

Oh, God.

M.

Girls. Women. Other women. My failures. Which are legion.

W.

And.

M.

Don't include you.

W.

Not yet. So. What about them. Women. Your legions. Failures.

M.

Not so many, actually--a small enough sample to be statistically insignificant. Entirely unscientific.

W.

That you keep count in itself isn't without problems.

M.

It wasn't for lack of trying. And, well, this thing I'm working on is . . . It's mostly sex. Couples. Or coupling, I suppose. So young--

W.

Your exploits--

M.

Mostly.

W.

Mostly.

M.

Young.

W.

(Pause.)

Why?

M.

It's a young subject, mostly. Or what I'm--

W.

Fucking.

M.

Not just that. Though I was thinking--

W.

What is it you want to shine a light on if not--

M.

The carnal?

W.

What else?

(Pause.)

Oh, Christ. Surely not our youth. Surely not more of that. The world has been subjected to enough reminiscence--

M.

I agree.

W.

Then what?

M.

I'm not entirely sure. I'm not sure how exactly--sex, men, women--what it all--

W.

No--

M.

--means.

W.

Oh, God.

M.

I thought you wouldn't like it.

W.

Why do you have to--

M.

I don't have to.

W.

Are you attempting to recapture something, is that it? Or are you feeling some vital dissatisfaction--

M.

No.

W.

--or resentment--

M.

No.

W.

It's a clich--

M.

It could be.

W.

No, it is.

M.

It might be.

W.

Or sexist nightmare.

M.

I hope not. Look, I know all that, give me some credit, and I don't know why, I just thought it might . . .

W.

What?

M.

Things keep coming up. Images. You know the kind of thing. Flashes, moments.

W.

Oh, God.

M.

This is like your sitcom with the talking cat who can only say "fucking shit," only all you can say is, "Oh, God," and not when I'd liked to hear it. Look, I don't ask for them, but I don't know how to deal with them--

W.
Your flashes.

M.
I'm not starting therapy this late, I'm not working on anything else right now, and I like the form.

W.
Which is?

M.
I don't know. Images. Moments. Which have to do with--

W.
Women.

M.
(Pause.)
And sex.

W.
Fuck--

M.
Failure. Mostly. When I was very young and very different and completely fucked up.

W.
As opposed to--

M.
I told you--

W.
I know. You thought I might not love it. The confessions, the angst of an aging--

M.
All right--

W.
Which makes me--

M.
I don't know.

W.

Foolish.

M.

It's not clear enough yet. It's just a thing. In my head.

W.

And you're going to offend me, all women, or just the women you have or haven't been with. For now. Are you at least going to disguise--

M.

Being anonymous will be disguise enough, don't you think?

W.

I don't know why--

M.

I don't either, and I don't think it has so much to do with you, really. Or us, I mean. That was clumsy.

W.

It was. As you go I'll let you know how much trouble you're in--I will speak individually and as a representative of women everywhere.

At the end of the scene M. and W. do not leave the theater; they are somewhere in the balcony, or preferably in the corners overlooking the stage where they will be throughout.

SCENE TWO

AT RISE:

Music: White Snake, "We're Going to Be Friends." On the screen is the viaduct in Chaumont; snow; photos or video or staging of kids, 8-10, bundled for weather. NICK (8, mute) is there; BERENICE, same age, is there in a white parka; conversation is mostly mimed, some French and some English should be heard; some parents are there, separated by nationality. NICK pulls a new American sled; the French kids don't have any. He leaves it, talks to BERENICE. An older NICK (teens) is upstage, just in the light. He speaks.

NICK

Bérénice. God, when was that--late 50s, sledding the day of a rare snowfall, underneath the 1857 viaduct, one of the highlights of a visit to Chaumont in the Haute-Marne, we're assured today in the *toute la ville*. My dad the Colonel was stationed there, saving the world from the Commie hordes. How many French Communists were executed by the Gestapo near the famous viaduct--Chaumont was a *Maquis* center during the war. By the mid or late 50s much had been forgiven, I suppose, though we sometimes found our tires with the air let out of them in the morning where we lived. Still, for the most part we were just *les Américains*. And Bérénice--we were in a bilingual program organized by SHAPE or NATO or somebody, a few hand-picked French and American eight and nine year-olds thrown together in the local *lycée* so the older teachers could monitor us--this Saturday afternoon sledding party organized by our French brute of a teacher, God she was awful, but here was a chance to see Bérénice out of school while the parents watched and tried their halting English and French with each other.

My mother saved a class picture from the *Stars and Stripes*--

(Slide projects if possible.)

--and there I am, standing next to Bérénice, smitten by this brown eyed girl in a gray-blue smock and white ribbon, holding onto the edge of her desk, dark bangs, standing next to me, not looking at me but at the camera, looking worried because of the tyrant who punished us for the slightest infraction. But that Saturday afternoon in the snow I could almost forgive even the teacher--Bérénice the French beauty long lost except in a family photograph, there, the face alive in memory, *a great loveliness of ghosts*, even if I am probably long gone from her memory, though I live in the absurd hope that I linger in some black and white film of hers . . .

Music: “Poison Ivy”; the slide changes to the pool at the town branch of the Army-Navy C.C.; the pool is projected, the lights shift to brilliant D.C. summer sun; adolescents in early 60s bathing suits are upstage gathered around one perfect sixteen-year-old GIRL; the same young, now very uncomfortable NICK is at a far remove from her down right center. The music fades down but not out.

NICK

From the nameless hosts of infancy--D.C. summer, 1958 or '59, age what--ten or eleven, the pool at the Army-Navy Country Club discovering what--girls, bodies, tanned promise, one in particular alive in a fervid spot of memory--small, compact, sun-bleached, in my memory frozen at the center of older boys I could barely imagine becoming, a girl so ideal, entirely beyond imagination only a few feet away. Reverie without having a word for the idea, all in a setting from my childhood.

Dad was stationed in Washington years before, when . . . God, I hate it when someone asks me where I'm from. It's not an easy question.

We were back there again, the pool transformed by adolescent summer, blue tumescent fever, hot the way the Potomac gets, old shade trees on the side of the hill overlooking the golf course and clubhouse, red brick, white shutters, green awnings, a Federal Southern military style about as familiar as it gets for me, watching this beauty reflected in the waters with no idea exactly what I was feeling.

“Poison Ivy”, “Love is Strange”, bad doo wop I suppose but who knew or cared--“Mister Blue” still makes me think of that water, of what went through me when I saw flesh-- the girl's perfection I could only sense as she and the rest of them lay out, the way the Potomac gets hot beneath the old elms, oaks, sycamores, a girl just too old, enough beyond my reach to be a phantasm and trigger reverie --“What's Your Name?”

(Music cue.)

This ideal, the daughter of one of my father's West Point classmates, a huge Pennsylvania Dutch Republican. My dad and his classmates teased this guy about the amount of scotch he could absorb in his wooden leg, the wooden leg he showed us once, the real one blown off at Anzio. I was five or six when the guy showed it to us in a room at the Hotel Thayer when my dad was teaching at West Point--my sisters and I were transfixed by the fascinating, intricate contraption as he smiled and teased us and told us it was all right to stare at the stump--my childhood. Where I'm from.

But *this* summer, that mythical giant was nothing to me but the progenitor of perfect bronzed flesh.

Music: “Little Bitty Pretty One”; the slide shows a military base's quarters in semi-darkness; the stage darkens;

the young NICK is down left with a group of boys who are behaving in the particularly revolting way eleven and twelve year-old boys can; down right is a girl the same age: SARAH.

NICK leaves his friends as the lights dim; what is left is the impression of lights in the quarters surrounding a courtyard; NICK and SARAH are alone on the stage lying down together.

NICK

A later summer night, dark and *hot the way the Potomac gets*, the river flowing just below the base--Bolling Air Force Base in the shadow of Generals Row, in retrospect one great irony is that we were a few yards from Curtis LeMay's quarters--the same Federal red brick, green shutters, white paint, old trees. And Sarah, the very first what . . .

The stage is dark; NICK and SARAH have gone upstage and are seen in silhouette against the projection.

NICK (CONT.)

At twelve Sarah and I were mostly curious but it was pure, enough, that and the whispered half-knowledge of kids, whatever it was we thought was supposed to happen on summer nights pressed together in the darkness in the shadow of Generals Row, close to Curtis fucking LeMay, just outside our own fathers' quarters. What I remember is not so much urgency as curiosity, after the other kids had gone in or off somewhere else, when dinner was over, when it was dark enough, when we could find some corner. Sarah a little taller than I was, strawberry blonde, solid, funny, bold, daring me--other boys talked about it--girls, sex--it--to the point of exhaustion and here she was, actual, soft, willing.

(Pause.)

We smelled of swimming pool, lotion, summer, sweet, still in bathing suits, tee shirts, damp from the heat, night, afternoon, endless neighborhood baseball games, our mouths scrubbed by gum, Cokes from the PX before we tried--what was it--*the way the Potomac gets*--tried what we would at twelve behind our quarters, borrowed houses and rooms and yards, within a few yards of Curtis LeMay, for which we deserve retrospective points on style, don't we? Families living together a few years, a given in our lives, so whatever did or didn't happen wasn't permanent--*that's where we're from*. Good Southern or Southwestern stock by way of the base, those things didn't matter, not at twelve. Surrounded by crickets, tall old trees not far from the river, safe behind a Federal fence--not reverie, better. Palpable, blameless slippery safety in the dark. Behind Generals Row, officers' kids, religious, good kids, above that sort of thing, right? None of it mattered whatever was said or whispered because on those nights we didn't need to say much.

SCENE THREE

AT RISE:

Music: "Hey Baby." NICK changes into costume for the next scene in the upstage shadow while the scene is set; LULU hands him a transistor which he tunes and puts in the pocket of his parka; they are both played as 14. M. and W. step forward.

M.

The line -- "*from shadowy regions and faces and bodies, the great loveliness of ghosts.*"

W.

Yes?

M.

The hosts of--from *The Odyssey*. When he goes to Hades to find the way home and sees the parade of women's shades.

W.

Women' shades. Souls.

M.

Yes.

W.

From your past. Whom you have offended. Or are going to--

M.

Not exclusively.

W.

In thought, word, or deed. You are fucked.

M.

I used to think . . . I listen to people describe growing up in one place and wonder what that would be like.

W.

(Points at the stage.)

You were older. More dangerous.

M.

Maybe.

(Laughs.)

Jesus. A freshman in high school. One afternoon I'd been hunting with my father, a Saturday afternoon, one of the clearest memories I have, the two of us and the family dog in the woods in the Upper Peninsula, the U.P., a perfect fall afternoon, then later watching a high school football game with him on a freezing cold night, for Christ's sake. Dad played football as a kid, of course--no way I ever would, but he could live with that somehow, even joked about it, and that night there wasn't any resentment, there was something else, something, I don't know. Good. Father and son stuff. And then . . .

W.

The girl.

M.

Yeah. Lulu.

W.

Did you talk to her about--

M.

My father? No. She--that was something else, or I was trying to be somebody else, some half-assed hood. A--

W.

Hood?

M.

You remember. Half delinquent, half James Dean--pack of Camels, booze swiped from Dad, all of this at fourteen and here I was riding back from a fucking high school football game on a bus with a blonde farm girl cheerleader, and in my head I'm still smiling, thinking of the field, my dad, the family dog, the perfect sunset and sky.

(Pause. Lights up on LULU and NICK.)

W.

She's cute.

M.

Yeah.

“Sherry” plays on the transistor; M. and W. go upstage into the shadow; cold light; snow gobos.

LULU and NICK stop upstage near a fire-escape beneath a slide of a crumbling plain brick surfaced school building built some time in the 1920's or '30's. They're dressed against the cold of mid-October in the Upper Peninsula. Awkward pause.

It's o.k.	LULU
What?	NICK
Nobody can see us.	LULU
I guess not.	NICK (He fumbles with his gloves and the transistor, pulls out cigarettes.)
Want one?	LULU
No.	NICK
You mind?	LULU (Sighs.)
No.	NICK (Lights up.) I was dying for one all the way back on the bus.
I could tell.	LULU (She adjusts her coat and reveals her short skirt and tights.)
Look, I gotta' get home.	

Right now?

NICK

(He produces a hip flask from his coat and offers it to her; she shakes her head; he takes a long sip from it and screws up his face.)

Soon. My mother--

LULU

She strict?

NICK

Like you care about my mother.

LULU
(Cocks her head at him and laughs.)

You're right. I don't.

NICK

But I don't have all night.

LULU

So c'mere.

NICK

(He stubs out his cigarette, opens his coat, moves toward her and puts his hands inside her coat around her waist.)

Just like that?

LULU

What do you mean?

NICK

He pulls her to him; she doesn't resist; she stands on her tiptoes to meet him; the rest of the dialogue punctuates their making out on and against the fire-escape.

You base kids--

LULU

We're different somehow?

NICK

LULU
No, only--hey, watch it, hey--
(Laughs.)

NICK
C'mon. C'mon.

LULU
(Leans away from him.)
Give me some.

NICK
What?

LULU
(Spins out from him, dances to the radio.)
You know. That. The booze. What is it anyway?

NICK
Oh, this? I thought it was me.
(Teases her, hands her the flask and
watches as she drinks.)
It's bourbon. My dad will kill me if he finds out I took it.

LULU
The General?

NICK
Colonel. Yeah.

LULU
And here you are. Imagine if the coaches, or the principal, if they could see us--big
officer's kid, brainy kid with the poor little farmer girl--

NICK
Those assholes? Who cares. C'mon back.

LULU
(Goes back inside his coat in the
stairwell.)
Tough guy, huh? College kid--

NICK
What? I'm fourteen.

LULU

But you will be, you know it. And--you're my first base kid.

NICK

Meaning?

LULU

Don't get excited.

(Hands him the flask.)

You know--you're the first from the base I ever--you know.

(She kisses him.)

NICK

And that's a big deal?

LULU

No. I guess. I don't know. But--

(They are making out seriously again;
after a couple of minutes she silently
pushes his hands away under the coat.)

O.k. Hey. Not here. Not that.

NICK

What does that mean?

LULU

You know.

NICK

No, I don't. What I do know is that--

LULU

I have to . . .

NICK

What.

LULU

(Kisses him.)

It's late.

NICK

I know. I just thought, being the first and all--

LULU

Don't be a jerk. It's just late, that's all. It's not . . .

(She kisses him for a long time.)

It's just late. My mom, Jesus. I'd better chew some gum.

NICK

You want me to walk you?

LULU

Of course.

NICK

We're not so different, you know.

(Pulls her back against him.)

LULU

Yes we are. You've lived--I don't even know where, but you guys have lived everywhere, been everywhere, and when your dad gets transferred--

NICK

He'll go to Viet Nam, probably.

LULU

So? Half the kids from here go in the service, too, and not like your dad.

NICK

No. I know.

LULU

Besides, it doesn't have anything to do with this.

NICK

It's not like . . .

(Long pause.)

I don't know.

LULU

Walk me home, Nick. Tough guy. Like you won't forget this, smart boy--come on, you'll forget all this tomorrow if you want to, and nobody blames you.

(Dances away from him.)

I'm just a poor little farm girl, dirt poor dumb U.P. kid while you, the Colonel's boy . . .

(Laughs and kisses him again.)

I mean, I don't stand a chance. You'll forget me.

NICK

(Stares at her, smiles.)

No.

(Walks into the brightest spot on stage,
lights a cigarette and take a pull from the
flask.)

No, I won't. Screw it--let's go if you have to go, but don't tell me that.

LULU

Whew--sexy tough guy. Come on, then. Walk me home.

As NICK and LULU exit down right, M. and W.
enter upstage as "Wildflower" fades up and the
stage is cleared.

W.

She's something.

M.

Yeah.

W.

Did you keep going with her--?

M.

Not for long. I was a kid--I was a mess. And she was right. We left not long after that.
My dad got transferred.

W.

But you didn't forget.

M.

No--"*great loveliness of ghosts*," remember? Sometimes . . . She said, "you guys have
lived everywhere, been everywhere," but that's not quite it. When we've gone, after a few
years . . . It's as if we were never there. That base isn't there now--it's a park, or a prison,
elderly housing, a shopping center, something, all for the better, but it's as if . . . I used to
think I'd visit all my old schools some day . . .

W.

Touch of self-pity?

M.

Yeah. When Lulu told me that night that I'd forget, she didn't know about the afternoon, the perfectly turned colors at the edge of a hill near Pickford maybe, not too far from Kincheloe, early on a Saturday afternoon, the afternoon spent bird hunting with my father when he wasn't flying, and I wasn't busy with school, or a girl, or trying to find booze for that night. I remember I told myself--mark this, Nick, remember this time, this one precise instant and spot, mark it in your tables. We'd crossed a field, then a stream, we were headed west, it was getting cold, I was sure Dad had a flask but he was pissed at me for stealing booze from him before, an adolescent sin compounded because I took the good bourbon, so he kept the flask in his jacket. We had the family dog, who had a lousy nose but a great point, only the birds, the hunting weren't really the thing, not for me, and I don't think for him. It was the afternoon, the field, the hill in front of us, the trees turning, the hard blue fall sky, a cold sun setting in front of us--rare, strained because we both wanted a drink and I wanted a cigarette, but still I took note. An idyll then. It wasn't my country or anything, what is, but there we were. And then that night . . .

W.

The girl. She's something.

M.

Yeah. On the steps of a schoolhouse, with ungainly, ungodly luck, on the edge of the world in the U.P., waiting for snow, late October, freezing cold, hiding from what--the town kids? No, farmers mostly, regular kids I knew by then were funny, normal, unimpressed, nice guys. The local girls mostly ignored us, though some like Lulu maybe wanted to figure out if there was anything worth notice.

W.

Tough guy.

M.

I said I'd walk her home, only I wanted to sneak a cigarette, James Dean alive and well with a pack of Camels, and she just watched me. Don't know how I struck the match, hyper-conscious of blonde bangs, blue eyes looking up while she grinned at my fumbling.

(Pause.)

I wonder if she ever . . .

W.

What.

M.

I heard later she got together this terrific guy, a hell of a lot better off than me. Had a farm and everything.

W.

Maybe she does. Think about you. Maybe she has.

M.

You're not objective.

W.

Oh, I'm becoming more so. One of the dangers of your reverie.

M.

Yeah.

Lights and music fade.

SCENE FOUR

AT RISE:

Bare stage, dark with leaf gobos. Enter NICK, now 19, sometimes in pools of light, sometimes in shadow, joined by JOHANNA, also 19, blonde. Music: "Look at Miss Ohio"; JOHANNA exits downstage left through the house; NICK speaks to her back.

NICK

I remember the night in the Thunderbird.

JOHANNA stands in the aisle with her back to him, a few feet from the stage.

NICK (CONT.)

I'm sure what you remember is different--colored by contempt, or regret, if you remember much at all. We were young, trying out parts or something, and other than being desperate to be with you I didn't have a clue--though that much was real. Being with you. Mad in pursuit.

(JOHANNA turns to the stage, puzzled.)

Funny about the car. It was the fall of 1967, that night in the Thunderbird, and we were good middle class American kids, stoned and rebellious as we were, so the car featured. It was a big Thunderbird, a '62 or '63, the models I've always preferred to the '55's and '56. I remember another '62 or '63, years earlier, on the base in the U.P. of Michigan when I was fourteen or fifteen--belonged to my mother's friend, who had a gorgeous daughter. The daughter was twelve maybe and she had a crush on me, I knew it but I couldn't even see her yet--

JOHANNA

This doesn't have anything to do with--

NICK

Oh, but it does. It's about longing. Lost opportunity. Setting who this idiot boy is--

JOHANNA

I don't--

NICK

All right. Sure. Meanwhile.

NICK stops, produces an old green duffel; lights change; it is evening, fall, Midwest, 1967.

JOHANNA crosses the stage, now carrying a book bag as he watches her; she doesn't see him.

NICK looks up into the house studying something. He takes a joint from his jacket and lights up, hiding as well as he can from view before he puts it out and relaxes.

W.

(In the wings to M.)

This is . . . Fucked.

NICK (CONT.)

Hello in there--Professor, Mrs. Professor, anybody? I'm looking for a girl. Not just any girl--sorry. A specific girl. I've come hundreds of miles and eighteen hours to see a girl I've spent maybe four hours with because--look, just let me in, let me use your phone, maybe pour me one of those martinis you're mixing, we'll watch Cronkite together and I can explain everything, you'll understand, it's the oldest story in the world and you, of all people, I mean you're educated, you've been around, you've got to understand.

You probably know her, maybe one or both of you have her in class or choir or maybe you've noticed her--not the most beautiful, maybe when I met her it was just splendor in the grass, but that afternoon, that perfect fall Midwestern afternoon--

W.

What is it with you and the climate?

M.

Give me a break.

NICK

There she was, serene, unreachable, impossible for somebody like me. And here I am, Jesus, here I am under these trees, what are they, anyway, I'll have to find out, write that down somewhere, these huge firs or something, and it's cold and I'm stoned and I'm staring into your windows and I have no clue what I'm gonna'--

(Long pause.)

JOHANNA

We spent a couple of hours one afternoon at your school--what was it, some game, then a couple of joints and a blues festival that night, and then a week later there you were. Two states, hundreds of mile--

NICK
 You didn't mind.

JOHANNA
 I was surprised.

NICK
 You must have known.

JOHANNA
 What--

NICK
 --I was doing. Exactly.

JOHANNA
 You told me you were hitching to see a friend.

NICK
 You remember what you did? After I called? You came, found me wandering around in the library, stoned, a little goofy . . . You didn't think it was--

JOHANNA
 (Barely audible.)
 Stop it. Just go on.

JOHANNA turns her back and crosses quickly upstage left out of the light. NICK exits up right as "Miss Ohio" plays. When he re-enters the lights change; colder autumn light; the front bucket seats and a console from a '62 Thunderbird come in upstage center. JOHANNA re-enters; they speak for a few seconds. They stand near the edge of midstage right for a long kiss; he is hesitant, open-eyed; she is smiling and has clearly been waiting for him to make his move for a while. After they break JOHANNA sees the Thunderbird seats and moves downstage left, into the aisle.

NICK
 What was it about you, what whiff that sent me hundreds of miles, eighteen hours, through Iowa, up through Minnesota, and there I was, an idiot wondering if I should just turn around and go back, looking up through the trees at the faculty houses, the old carpenter Victorians . . .

I wanted to knock on a door and explain to the professor's wife who answered--I was sure I knew what she'd look like down to the clasp on the chain holding her sweater around her neck, I'd tell her I was exactly like the kids in her husband's classes, really, I could send for my books, the transfer wouldn't take much time, my motive was ancient, surely she'd understand. And the funny thing is she probably would have before she called her husband and sent for the thorazine.

(Pause.)

Instead--

JOHANNA

Instead.

NICK

I called you. And--

JOHANNA

And--

NICK

Another chain of events. Visits. Give it a name.

JOHANNA

No.

NICK

Our third, maybe fourth time together, impulses, long drives, hitching. I borrowed the Thunderbird from a guy in the fraternity house where the college I'd transferred to had stuck me--I talked him into it, I have no idea how. I don't remember much about him--tall, red hair, his parents were hairdressers outside Chicago or Milwaukee, I think he was gay, lonely, bored, I know we were high most of the drive. Maybe that was part of the excitement for you: being the goal.

JOHANNA

Jesus. The goal. A whiff.

(Comes onstage.)

Sorry to interrupt.

NICK

Go ahead.

JOHANNA

Goal? How was I supposed to know what that meant? You came out of nowhere, and you wanted--

NICK

You.

JOHANNA

You didn't know me. You don't know me. You wanted to sleep with me. Don't dress it up--

NICK

(Looks up at W.)

A subject--

JOHANNA

What?

NICK

Fucking--

JOHANNA

You never called it that. I--

NICK

No. I wouldn't have, would I. Funny thing about those days.

NICK moves upstage and pushes the truck with the car seats and console further downstage.

JOHANNA

What? No.

(She exits down left.)

NICK

For me there was something just out of reach, even when you . . . I was right, wasn't I. Just beyond reach.

JOHANNA

And you blame me.

The lights change again, this time very dim with snow gobo and snow from the flies; only the car seats are lit; there is a glow from the dash. 1967 radio songs; engine idling and heater sound effects. They cross to the seats;

JOHANNA glares across them at NICK before she puts on a parka and gets in the passenger seat. He, too, puts on a parka, and settles into the driver's side. They are back in 1967, making out; her coat is open with his hands inside; the scene should not be too long nor too loud, but it should be obviously, and for the audience uncomfortably graphic; we can hear her shudder several times; finally the music fades.

JOHANNA

Stop. Once more and I shall faint.

The music and snow fade; the lights are dim but more general; JOHANNA and NICK separate but stay in the car for an awkwardly long time. She is first to get out of the seats and crosses up left, entirely out of the light.

NICK

(Still seated.)

What you remember may be different.

JOHANNA

(Quietly.)

You prick.

(Comes into the light; louder.)

What am I supposed to--

NICK

Anything, but to the purpose.

JOHANNA

Don't quote--

NICK

I admit, by the way, to profound embarrassment about what happened, not only with but before and after you. I could never find the right tone, word, the right anything about sex after you.

JOHANNA

Stop it.

NICK

I fucked up with you, though I'm still not sure, not that it matters, whether that was before or after you--

JOHANNA

Stop it.

(Long pause.)

You don't know me--you never did. You wanted--

NICK

I wanted--

JOHANNA

If this--

(Points at the car seats.)

--is so important to you, then it is, but this wasn't the end, it wasn't what was final, not even close to it, it isn't at the heart of anything. You're not telling all of it, not even--

NICK

(Gets up and starts to push the seats upstage.)

I know. I was an asshole, so hey, it's a wash.

JOHANNA

Huh. You think.

NICK

How the fuck was I supposed to recover--at nineteen, how do I . . .

(Points at the seats.)

I was trying to be, trying . . .

(Pause.)

How? I know it was, it was just . . . All the more reason for you to--

JOHANNA

Stop it.

NICK

--Though you couldn't have known it, I know that, rationally I understand that.

JOHANNA

I don't even know what that means.

NICK

What occurs to me, what has occurred to me is that the whole thing was something you were trying on, some kind of excursion.

Don't--

JOHANNA

Are you going to deny--

NICK

NO. No. No. What . . . What do you want me . . . That I'm sorry, all right, I'm--

JOHANNA

Oh, fuck you. That's beside the point.
(Long pause.)

NICK

What?

JOHANNA

Who's sorry, who's right, who's wrong, that's not it.

NICK

You can't keep--it isn't my fault.

JOHANNA

Listen.

NICK

Radio music fades in again; they look at the car seats.

JOHANNA

Please. That's not fair.

NICK

It's not fair, but this, what I remember, the Thunderbird--it happened, it's incontrovertible. We were there. That night I was nineteen, in the car, with you, stoned, overheated--

JOHANNA

Don't--

NICK

--and I was lost.

W.
(To M. in the wings.)

You were fucked.

NICK looks away first, leans down to push the seats offstage as JOHANNA stares at his back. Slow fade: music. They come back in through the house, JOHANNA right and NICK left with his duffel; they cross each other downstage and embrace, NICK behind her; after they break she crosses the stage into a dark area upstage left, but still visible. He stands watching her.

NICK

I have no way of knowing what's become of you, or what would have become of either one of us if I hadn't made that choice, taken the step, jumped off, walked across the plowed dirt late autumn fields, up the road, under the tall firs or whatever the hell they were because you were--

JOHANNA

The object. About whom you knew--

NICK

Some--

JOHANNA

Nothing.

NICK

No? Split-level gated suburb, daddy's Scandinavian only child golden girl, little bit rebellious high school dream-girl--one of your friends sleeps with your teacher, some tale about you and a boyfriend in a car, always cars, then college and a little dope--

JOHANNA

And you think because you slept with me, you think that . . . Gave you some insight, some sort of right. Jesus. You're a type, Nick. The times, this place, the world is overrun with guys who think they're entitled, who . . .

(Pause.)

You don't know me. You never did.

NICK

No? When you said--

JOHANNA

What you thought was that sex was enough, what you wanted was enough--I don't know what you thought. It doesn't matter.

NICK

And after? As long as I'm imagining you, what did you tell yourself--that boy I slept with, my mistake, misstep, the sad one, fool, bad poet, bad taste left over from . . .

JOHANNA

You wanted something I didn't, so . . .

NICK

A couple of years after, maybe less, I wrote that you told me to break a beer bottle a thousand miles away from you.

JOHANNA

If that's how you want it.

Long silence. Finally JOHANNA crosses the stage to exit; "Corrina, Corrina" plays very low as she exits down left. NICK exit up right and waits just out of the light.

SCENE FIVE

AT RISE:

Morning light, late fall: NICK re-enters. W. and M. return to their places in the audience. Low music and traffic sounds.

NICK

There was another time, before the end with her, riding home in other people's cars, all day Sunday and most of the night hitching--a thousand miles from you. I was way off the Interstate, east of the Mississippi, between Fountain City and Arcadia, after a strange ride on Highway 61 that went a little wrong. I mean, how could I resist Highway 61? Besides, I didn't much care how or when I got back--it was that kind of day out of Minnesota, gray and cold but clear-- sad, though I couldn't figure exactly why, I must have seen it all coming--late fall, just starting to snow and in that part of the country snow is a threat. I asked my father the Colonel once if he had wanderlust, though I'm sure I said itchy feet; he gave me an odd look, one in a lifetime of odd looks. Dad shrugged, said he guessed so. That day when I left you to go back to school I didn't want to go and I'm still not sure why I did. Fear, convention, you told me I had to? Then a kiss. All of it is confused with sad, late adolescent myth, ends of seasons, the already dying heart of the heart of the country, but Jesus it was sad and cold and tired and I wanted to stop moving. Where I ended up in the early afternoon was small, dead, nowhere, a café where I had a hamburger and a Coke; I thought, why not just stop here, call my parents, or don't call them, just stop, send for you . . . Disappear, fall off the map, right here, even though this really wasn't the country any more, it had already passed the town by, the place was faded, forgotten. Not just quiet: silent. A place to disappear.

(Pause.)

I didn't stop. Night fell and snow and I found the Interstate and kept going south, back to school, to what I knew. Later I got picked up by two black airmen driving back to their base, and I grinned because this was my world so we shot the shit comfortably, me in the back of an old fast Ford next to a duffel bag while they listened to a Chicago soul station on the radio--

(Music fades in.)

--and complained about officers, laughing to each other, then laughing more but with a cool difference after I told them my dad was a Colonel and they said he probably wasn't an asshole, and I wondered if they'd think he was. The further and faster they drove, the later it got, the closer to school, the bluer I got--a thousand miles from you, no lonesome cowboy on the prairie, just a Colonel's boy and that made the night dark and cold, made the low familiar talk from the front seat at least soothing so for a few minutes I nodded off before they woke me up to tell me my exit was coming up.

These guys, this conversation, my dad being an asshole or not, the duffel, the Ford, the music from the front seat, the base where I probably knew half the families--*it's where I'm from*. What was the point anyway when it didn't have so much to do with anything really, the snow was falling pretty hard now, the two guys had grown quiet, maybe they were down the closer they got to their base and God knows I was blue. If I could give myself more credit I'd say that I had the sense that I was moving too fast with you but we both know now that's wrong, though that night and that car and those two fine souls, the afternoon idyll next to Highway 61, the early snow and all that sorrow--was how many lifetimes ago now.

Radio music continues.

SCENE SIX

AT RISE:

W. and M. enter from the audience; bare stage.

W.

You expect me to sympathize.

M.

No. Well.

W.

Aside from the fact that this gives you license for serial nostalgic adultery--melancholy, nostalgia and adultery--that was close to--

M.

All right.

W.

(Pause as they cross downstage.)

You think . . . The line was rehearsed? About fainting?

M.

It never occurred to me.

W.

Of course not.

M.

You do?

W.

Might have been.

M.

She couldn't have known we were going to be there--

W.

Of course she could.

(Pause.)

She really got to you, huh? You were young. And from what you've told me, to say nothing of what I recall of the times, *you* were normally the one to leave.

M.

I don't know.

W.

So she ended it. Why?

M.

Self-preservation. I was . . . I had no idea what I was doing, and she's right, or I'm being honest or something. I didn't know her. I don't blame her.

W.

No?

M.

By any rational measurement I was out of my fucking mind.

W.

You wanted--

M.

Too much. I don't know. I wanted out of . . . You know me. Everything. And the thing is, with women, it amazed me that she would have me. That any woman would have me. Always has. The other day I heard some guy talk about the five or ten women out of a hundred who would suit him and I thought, five or ten?

W.

You're on dangerous ground.

M.

And . . . I can't help feeling she was . . .

W.

Trying you out. You said.

M.

Something like that.

W.

That's a little vain.

M.

Yeah. Well.

W.

You ain't over her yet, you know.

M.

Good one. I'm not over anything. Nobody is.

W.
I suppose not.

M.
I told you, things keep--

W.
Coming up, yeah, you said. So what do you do with--

M.
(Shrugs.)
I don't know. She's there.

W.
Sad. Sweet, too. Don't take that wrong. She got to you.

M.
Yeah. Well. Makes a good subject, huh?

W.
Hang onto that.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE SEVEN

AT RISE:

A mid-range commercial motel bed, a chair with a couple's clothes on it; a night stand with a lamp; the rest of the room can be imagined; dim light, only on the bed from a lamp on a bedside table.

M. and W. enter from the audience; the radio music from SCENE FIVE plays.

M.

(Points to the bed.)

Do you think it's ever possible--

W.

Oh, God.

M.

Not again.

W.

The topic is fucking. There's no innocent question you can ask now.

(Pause. She gestures to him.)

So . . . Ask.

M.

(Laughs.)

You just answered.

W.

Innocent sex.

M.

Not exactly.

W.

You know better. Once I thought it was all about history, then it was race, then gender, then class--now I don't know, but I do know everything's political, and with sex--

M.

I don't know.

W.

Which is why I told you this is at best dangerous.

M.

I still want an answer. Can sex ever be just that. What's the current vogue term--sport fucking.

W.

Who the hell uses that--

M.

I don't know. Pretend I didn't--

W.

Jesus. "The expense of spirit in a waste of shame," as the man says.

M.

So pure sex--

W.

Pure sex? Uncomplicated, just for itself.

(Pause.)

I've heard of it. I don't know. I have friends who say sure, but I don't know.

M.

Huh.

W.

You seem surprised. This is not exactly flattering--

M.

No, no, no. In love, something real, with duration, o.k. But kids, sometimes, free agents, I don't know.

W.

Do tell.

M.

Simple, un--

W.

You're not--

M.
--complicated--

W.
You are. Now exploits. More exploits. I told you, it's a cliché, the great male fantasy, what all straight men--

M.
And some women.

W.
Of course. With great courage, or fools, who confuse freedom with being the same as men. No, that's not fair. Frankly, most women who behave that way are characters invented by drooling old men in Hollywood.

M.
That's--

W.
I've overstated?

(Pause.)

I don't know. I'm not the person to ask, you should know that. And I think that for any woman at some point it will become complicated. In this imperfect, less than liberated world.

M.
You're not making this easy.

W.
Not my rôle.

(She kisses M. "The Way You Move"
plays.)

I know--the appeal of a drunk woman is obvious. Go ahead. Tell me about her. What's her name?

M.
Rachel. We'd gone out before Johanna. She was the real thing--jeans, old boots, played the banjo, she could care less about stuff. Today you see people trying to look the type but they don't get it. After Johanna we got back together, only Rachel knew I wasn't serious and she wasn't either. But we were together.

NICK undresses and get in the bed; he is joined by RACHEL; they are partially covered by a sheet; at the start of the scene she moves on top of him. She stops.

NICK

Whoa. That was great.

(RACHEL starts to move.)

Don't move.

RACHEL

Why.

NICK

You're gorgeous.

RACHEL

(Laughs.)

That's the best you can do?

NICK

C'mon. It was really good. I hope. Admit it.

RACHEL

Might have been better if you were thinking entirely of me, but yes. It was great.

(She rolls over, propped up on an elbow.)

Poor Nick.

NICK

What.

RACHEL

You got it bad.

NICK

Strange timing.

RACHEL

Not really.

(She gets out of bed, walks into the shadow, puts on his shirt, and gets into bed next to him.)

NICK

(Pulls her down on top of him.)

I was doing more than thinking about you. Admit it.

RACHEL

(Kisses him.)

Jesus. Guys--yes, yes, you were wonderful.

(Nick groans and she laughs.)

You were.

(She gets up and walks just out of the light.)

Hey. I've been meaning to ask. What happened with you and that girl?

NICK

Who?

RACHEL

Julie.

NICK

What--

RACHEL

I know you got together with her, that's not what I mean, but the night you took her home I heard something about her and some other guy. What--

NICK

I don't remember.

RACHEL

(Comes back to bed.)

Yes you do. C'mon, tell me. It was Robby, right? Tell me. He acts so, I don't know, like he understands something the rest of us don't. I'm not a big fan.

NICK

Jesus. I don't know. We were, well, at least I was stoned, it was hot, we were outside on campus and I had a bottle of wine. I offered Robby a drink and he got very heavy, you know how he and his friends get--all important and serious, hardly gives a guy like me any notice, you know, and he was all bent on impressing Julie, so . . . So he said, "I'm an *ascetic*." Then she, Julie, looked at me, and the two of us were trying to seduce her, at least I know I was, and I think she was enjoying the hell out of it. So, I said I was a drunk, she started laughing, and she ended up going home with me. What that says about me, or Julie I don't know.

RACHEL

(Smiles, tries not to laugh.)

Pretty good line.

NICK

C'mon. Even Robby laughed. In fact, he probably had a better time.

RACHEL

You see? You had to be a jerk.

NICK
What?

RACHEL
It's a small school, Nick.

NICK
Christ.

RACHEL
People say you just dropped her after that. Completely. It's fucked up. You fucked up.

NICK
It's not as if she was serious. It was one night. It was sex.

RACHEL
Nick, Nick, Nick, that's weak. A girl sleeps with you and you think it doesn't mean anything, that it's all right to--

NICK
No. But it's not like it's a pattern, like I spend all my time--

RACHEL
It's not the first time. You know it. Other people know it. You're damaged, because of whatever happened.

NICK
(Pulls her to him.)
Jesus. What did I do?

RACHEL
It's not what you did or didn't do, but I told you. You're still hung up on her.

NICK
Her.

RACHEL
The chick from Minnesota. Johanna.

NICK
No--

RACHEL

It's o.k. Sometimes it's cute.

(He pulls away quickly.)

I know what we are isn't some great thing, but . . .

NICK

What.

RACHEL

Now you're being a prick.

(Starts to get out of bed.)

NICK

(Pulls her back down and starts to take off
her shirt.)

I'm sorry. I just want to be clear what we're talking about.

RACHEL

Don't be a prick. It doesn't suit you.

(She puts his shirt back on.)

NICK

What does that mean?

RACHEL

You can be an asshole, but don't try to be a prick.

NICK

So you said.

RACHEL

It's a compliment.

NICK

I can start being a prick. Watch me.

RACHEL

No. You can't. That's why sleeping with you isn't so simple.

(Long pause.)

You see--

NICK

It's not complicated.

(He pulls her down; they undress and get
partly under the sheet.)

RACHEL

You're pathetic. There are people, you know, who treat this as an art.

NICK

Oh, Jesus. And I'm a horny drunk.

They both laugh, hard, and end up making out and holding each other. Finally she sits up in the bed and looks down at him.

RACHEL

I know this isn't much to you, that I'm not--

NICK

That's not true.

RACHEL

That girl did a number on you. What happened?

NICK

Nothing so unusual. Same old song and--

RACHEL

O.k., o.k.

(Pause.)

NICK

You know, I'm really not thinking about that.

RACHEL

That? Her.

As the lights fade down, "Waitin' on a Friend" fades up and they clearly start to screw again for a minute or so. Music plays as M. hesitates to enter; set changes; as NICK and RACHEL exit down right they cross M. and W. Finally W. comes a few steps down right into the light.

SCENE EIGHT

AT RISE:

Music continues: M. comes in with W.; M. does a little boogie; the stage is bare, bright.

W.

(Watches him move, smiles.)

And there you go. It's what you want back.

M.

What?

W.

Boogying.

M.

Not just that.

W.

All these exciting, young--

M.

NO. No.

W.

Then what? Tell me it isn't nostalgia, regret, not--

M.

I'm not saying that. Anyway, it isn't so much about us.

W.

Ah, flattery.

M.

You know what I mean.

W.

I don't.

M.

I'm not getting out of this, am I?

W.

Probably not. What happened with her? Rachel?

M.

I don't know. For a while we were o.k. You could see, she wasn't a fragile sort . . . I don't know, she wasn't really involved, so we, she--it was fine. We were friends. And I didn't--I don't keep up.

W.

Is--was she--how can I put this--one woman?

M.

No.

W.

Ah. You said yourself this was a hypothetical. Pure raw--

M.

I know.

W.

So I was right. She's a kind of--

M.

What--

W.

Fantasy--

M.

Well. More a summary, a gloss.

W.

Leaving out--

M.

--a few unimportant--

W.

--unpleasant--

M.

--insignificant--

W.

--potentially embarrassing--

M.

--unnecessary, nagging, even humiliating . . .

W.

For them, of course. For the girls.

M.

The women. Right.

W.

Have you answered your question?

M.

About just plain sex. "The expense of spirit." I don't know. This was a while back.

W.

That's where nostalgia interferes--

M.

And shows a slightly adventurous middle-class kid, a few--what do you insist on calling them?

W.

Expl--

M.

Exploits. Of course, as a friend of mine puts it, we tried, you know, with the sexual revolution, it wasn't for lack of trying. The will was there.

W.

You don't have to be apologetic.

M.

For?

W.

Failure as a Lothario. Or a prick. And I don't . . .

(Pause.)

Why the need to keep score?

M.

I could argue that it's anthropological. Even genetic. Be fruitful and--

W.

Please.

Puerile hangover?

M.

W.

More accurate, and thus slightly less unattractive.

M.

I wonder. When . . . No, *if* she, or all those she's think about me, how would it go. Because Rachel was right.

W.

About?

M.

My being fucked up. And as a result I tried to be--

W.

A prick.

M.

Something like that. At some point I got tired of whatever it was I was trying out, or tired of failure, I don't really remember. There were a lot of drugs, too. It occurred to me, as I recall, that it was mindless.

W.

"Mad in pursuit."

M.

He's never wrong.

W.

You were older.

M.

I don't know. It's not as if I realized that much. I did meet Louise.

W.

And that was . . .

M.

Complicated. You're right. I was older, so . . .

W.

It was more adult.

We were together for ten years. M.

You were over Jo-- W.

I suppose. I was still fucked up, don't get me wrong, but Louise and I, it's awkward. Sad. M.

How? W.

At the end . . . At first . . . It was fast, sudden, it was something. M.

You were in love. W.

By the end . . . M.

I know. W.

Music: "Visions of Johanna." NICK and LOUISE enter as the set changes; tall narrow bed only, possibly other furnishings to suggest a 1969 student apartment in D.C. They're beneath the sheets; LOUISE is in a black slip; NICK is nude.

I'm not always so easy. NICK

You should die. LOUISE

I could come home with you. NICK

What? LOUISE

NICK

For Christmas. I'm not doing anything. I don't feel like going home myself, and I've never been to New Orleans, so why not.

LOUISE

You barely know me.

NICK

Well--

LOUISE

Shut up.

NICK

I'm a little broke, so your folks will have to put me up.

LOUISE

You're not serious.

NICK

Why not? After New Years I go back to Wisconsin, you stay here, and then everything gets serious. I hate Christmas at home--

LOUISE

I can't. *Tu es fou*. Besides, after the break I'm supposed to be going out with this guy, there's a thing--

NICK

Really?

(Pulls her down.)

Tell him to get lost.

LOUISE

You're awfully confident.

(Pause.)

NICK

I'll figure something.

LOUISE

You're . . . You can't crash my family's Christmas, or just come back here afterwards because--

NICK

Why not? We get along so well. You look good right now.

LOUISE

Nice. How many times have you used that.

NICK

What do you want from me?

LOUISE

(Laughs.)

Sing to me again. Or play your harmonica. No--sing.

NICK

Maybe.

LOUISE

This is such a mistake.

NICK

(Whispers as they start moving.)

We'll see.

Music: "Up on Cripple Creek." M. and W. enter as the set and lights changes to suggest a Georgetown student apartment, late May, 1970.

W.

Did you go with her?

M.

No. But she came back, and I was mad in pursuit. But you remember, the world was crazy: the spring of 1970, everything falling apart, we were all convinced something big was happening, or at least I was, but I didn't know what the hell it was. Still, we don't pick our times, and there we were. Maybe in less crazy times, who knows, and that doesn't matter. What happened happened, times or not. Talk about bad faith.

W.

No.

M.

No? What it meant, well . . . I didn't care.

NICK and LOUISE are on a mattress on the floor, in a period-piece room: cinder block, milk crate bookcase, stereo, cheap lamp, broken chair covered with cheap batik and Indian prints. As the scene begins LOUISE buttons a shirt.

LOUISE

I should study.

NICK

Aren't exams canceled? I thought--

LOUISE

The professor's a White Russian. Anyway it's oral, it's easy. And we can't spend all our time screwing.

NICK

Why not?

(He reaches for a tin with papers and a baggie to roll a joint; she pours two glasses of Cognac.)

Somebody wouldn't approve?

LOUISE

My parents are coming tomorrow. Or the day after. Remember? You have to talk to my father.

NICK

Right. About making you an honest woman.

LOUISE

Stop it.

NICK

He'll be so happy.

(He lights the joint; she refuses as he smokes.)

This is ironic--we want to get married and we're afraid to tell them. Look, I'll behave.

LOUISE

No you won't.

NICK

No.

LOUISE

It doesn't matter. They'll agree or they won't.

NICK

Or?

LOUISE

They don't like you.

NICK

Why?

(Offers her the joint again.)

LOUISE

I can't imagine.

NICK

Seriously. I'm reasonably intelligent, presentable, you're not even pregnant--

LOUISE

You're not exactly what they're used to, or what they--

NICK

Wanted? Rich? Catholic?

LOUISE

No. Maybe. For starters. They have certain way of looking at things. Maybe you noticed they're a little old-fashioned, and you, well . . .

NICK

They hate me. Especially your father. He has a point. It's not as if I have any plans, other than . . . Come to think of it, any plans. But why should they care? You're rich, we'll live off your fortune, I'm not proud.

LOUISE

Very funny. I don't care, you know that, but--

NICK

That's what we'll tell them. We're moving to Boston, I may go to school, you'll maybe get some sort of fellowship, maybe not, but you'll go to school sooner or later, I have a modicum of talent, no money, we're young, we really like to screw--each other, so--

LOUISE

That should do it.

NICK

Can we borrow a car? The big one, your father's, the suburbo-swan--

LOUISE
(Takes a hit from the joint.)

Why work.

NICK
Remember a couple of weeks ago, the big demonstration, when I called Dad?

LOUISE
I didn't know you called him.

NICK
He said the Federal buildings were filled with troops. He said to watch it, and he's not an hysteric--three wars later, he's not worried about demonstrations. But there was an edge to his voice. Christ, the world is falling apart so fast nobody can keep track, we're a couple miles from the fucked up center, and we're worried about dinner with your parents.

LOUISE
They're my parents.

NICK
I know. I'll be good--

LOUISE
--You won't--

NICK
--clean up, wear a suit, pay for dinner--

LOUISE
Right.

NICK
I'll offer. They won't know what hit them.

LOUISE
Be quiet.

NICK
Really.

LOUISE
Come here.

(She rolls over and pulls him to her.)

Music: "Six Days on the Road." M. and W. cross as the scene changes; same period, a rec room with a pool table; they dress, he in going-out-with-the-folks-to-dinner clothes, LOUISE in a very short, tight, period red velvet skirt and white blouse; after they change, three older men, NICK'S father and two of his classmates, are enjoying the view as LOUISE bends over the table to shoot; NICK gets a kick out of it.

W.

Your father?

M.

And two classmates--remember the Pennsylvania Dutchman with the wooden leg? And a Deputy Chief of Staff of something, in one of their houses, McClean or Potomac, I don't remember, after dinner at the Army-Navy Country Club. Those troops in the Pentagon and the Federal buildings? One or both of these guys would have ordered them to fire, and there we were shooting pool in their basement. Louise and I skipped out after dinner to the golf course to smoke a joint--I wonder if Louise knew these guys were noticing while she bent over shooting pool. I knew.

W.

She knew.

M.

I remember the skirt.

W.

You would. She looks good.

The men exit. LOUISE and NICK are alone on the stage slow dancing near the pool table, very sexy. Dim light.

LOUISE

I'm wrecked.

NICK

I know. It's o.k. They're all upstairs. Drunk or asleep.

LOUISE

What if they're not?

(She and Nick make out.)

Nick--

NICK

We could go outside.

LOUISE

With the bugs. And it's too hot.

Images from SCENE TWO flash on the screen.

NICK

So let's stay here.

(They move out of the light.)

There's a couch here somewhere.

LOUISE

Bad enough *my* parents are furious about us.

NICK

Or the pool table.

LOUISE

Or wait till we get back to Georgetown.

NICK

You're no fun.

LOUISE

No?

(She moves down on him.)

NICK

Or . . .

(He moves her against the pool table and moves down on her.)

LOUISE

I thought you might change your mind.

Music: "Feels Like Rain." M. and W. cross LOUISE and NICK as they change into mid-70s clothes.

W.

Great loveliness of ghosts, was it?

M.

Sorry. It's . . . I don't know. It's the point, right?

W.

A certain lack of discretion. And you're reveling--

M.

No.

W.

All right.

(Pause.)

Ten years. You were young, sexy. You still love her, a little. It's understandable. Difficult, you understand, but understandable.

M.

Some. I told you--nothing disappears. The past is never past, isn't that it? So if I did love her, then . . .

W.

You're asking me for license. It's not easy.

M.

I don't think about it often.

W.

Please--

M.

Except for this, I don't.

W.

Go ahead.

(Long pause.)

M.

That summer, before we were married, I always wondered what her father knew or didn't know. Was that part of what he hated so much.

W.

If he saw anything he'd have been--

M.

I know. It didn't last long.

W.

You were together ten years.

M.

I meant living in sin. We married fast, at the end of the summer, barely eight month after we started. And we moved far, far away--it took a couple of years, but we figured things out, how to coexist with her parents, that's what we called it, mostly by lying, or ignoring the insults. Louise was good at it. Turns out she'd been at it for a long time with her family.

The screen shows the Café du Monde; LOUISE and NICK, maybe five years older, sit at a table with coffee; she reads a novel while he looks out over a newspaper at the street.

NICK

What are we doing?

LOUISE

What do you mean? Having coffee.

NICK

You know what I mean.

LOUISE

Don't.

NICK

So we'll keep this up forever.

LOUISE

I don't know. No. Of course not.

NICK

Then what? You don't even tell your mother you don't go to Mass, we have to pull this charade every Sunday you're home--

LOUISE

Jesus, we're here maybe three or four Sundays a year.

NICK

Sooner or later--

LOUISE

I know. What do you want me to do? They're not reasonable, they can't deal with it. They still can't deal with you.

NICK

No kidding.

LOUISE

You could try not being high all the time--

NICK

No chance--I'm not doing this straight.

LOUISE

What do you want from me? It's hard enough as it is, there's nothing else I can do.

NICK

You mean me.

LOUISE

I've told them it's their choice. I've made it clear to them.

NICK

I don't know how clear it is.

LOUISE

That's not fair. It's not all about you. Mostly . . . It's between my parents and me. I'm sorry if I haven't done everything you want me to do.

NICK

Sometimes it feels . . . As far as they're concerned, I'm some guy who signed a paper saying I wouldn't interfere in raising the kids.

LOUISE

That's part of it.

NICK

Fuck this. It's nuts.

LOUISE

You think I don't know it? I've been faking it since high school, so I'm used to it. But it's what there is. Oh, come on, like you never lied to your parents.

NICK

Of course I did. The difference is they love you--they wouldn't prefer you to be somebody else.

LOUISE

I know.

NICK

And the fact that they hate me?

LOUISE

We're married. They're Catholic. What can they do?

NICK

So we come down here on Sundays with the *Times* for coffee and beignets, and we wait for the inevitable explosion as if it weren't going to happen. And you wonder why I get stoned.

LOUISE

Jesus. Drop it.

NICK

As always.

LOUISE

Fuck you.

(Pause.)

NICK

That's not all of it.

LOUISE

No. But it's convenient for you, isn't it? Gives you a reason to get pissed off--laugh at them, make fun of them, but you knew about them, and you don't mind all of it--

NICK

What does that mean?

LOUISE

Don't.

NICK

It always comes back to that.

LOUISE

No. I'm sorry. But . . . You won't leave it alone. No, let me finish. I know, I know, they're horrible, they hate you, they're unfair, they need to change, the world we see is entirely different and oh so righteous while they live in a different, benighted century. But you know, you could drop it for a fucking hour while we sit here and enjoy the weather and the coffee instead of making me deal with this. I hate . . . They're my family. What do you want? What do you want me to do?

Music: "Who Are You." W. speaks as LOUISE exits through the house down right; NICK remains at the table as the scene changes to a café table in a square in Paris; late September, mid afternoon. M. is down left of W.

W.

You were still young.

M.

Yeah. She was in school, I was teaching. Maybe I was taking time off to write, I don't remember exactly. You knew me then. Us.

W.

That thing before was . . . You were cruel.

M.

A little. What was I supposed to do?

W.

Were you still in love?

M.

I don't know. Probably. I don't know. It was hard, not just because of family or work, we were different. We were young. We tried--we liked each other. This--

(Points at the stage.)

--Paris. Louise and I had been together six, maybe seven years. It was a big thing, a few weeks in Europe. We'd come from Italy--remember how different it was in the 70s? Or we were different. It's hard to tell the difference over the years. I wasn't ready at all, but it was something. Late afternoon in the Piazza Navona, driving from Rome to Siena on a deserted back road, barely speaking enough Italian to get by, but who cared. We went through the French countryside where I'd lived as a kid--

W.

Bérénice--

M.

Chaumont. Twenty years later Louise and I spent the night in Chaumont and I could swear I saw Bérénice, grown up and beautiful, at the news kiosk in the train station. We'd stopped for dinner--unlikely, I know, probably my imagination. I didn't tell Louise.

W.

Why?

M.

(Shrugs.)

The next morning we drove to Paris. Louise was at home, her French was perfect, she was so calm, and I was envious, I guess, there was some . . .

W.

You said it was something.

M.

For a while. No. That's not fair. It was good, we were having . . . We . . . She . . .

W.

Louise.

M.

Something. I don't remember that she did anything. Or that I did. I don't know what it was. I was different. At first I ignored it, then gradually I was more and more a jerk, then we . . .

NICK sits at the table with a coffee and a book; he looks up as a POET and his GIRLFRIEND enter the square; the other characters freeze as the lighting focuses on NICK.

The other characters move; a street POET, Parisian, mid-1970's, who begins to recite bad verse in mimed French; mostly he is ignored by the people in the square. NICK is intrigued by the GIRLFRIEND, a very pretty, very made-up blonde. The GIRLFRIEND passes the POET's large, showy hat for coins and they exit up right to a smattering of applause as LOUISE enters the square from down left; she sits at the table with NICK, motions to a WAITER and orders a drink in French.

So. LOUISE

Hey. NICK

What was that? When I came in. LOUISE

NICK
A poet. I think. Not so good, as far as I could tell. Hyperbolic--only the odd phrase registered, mostly, and I'm guessing, about love, a flower, fading I think, quickly or maybe not, sadly--and the evils of the modern world. I'm fairly sure about that. Nice outfit though--cool white scarf, black jeans, leather jacket--and a beautiful girl. Maybe too much eye shadow for the anti-bourgeois rant.

You took notes. LOUISE

I guessed. NICK

I meant the girl. LOUISE

(The WAITER returns with drinks.)

And you? NICK

I shopped. A little. Walked around. LOUISE

And? NICK

And nothing. LOUISE

NICK
(Sips at the drink.)
Not enough alcohol in this, though.

You want to get drunk? LOUISE

NICK

When have you known me not to want to be high? I think I may have a problem.

(She laughs.)

Something about being here--

(Points at the square, the sky.)

--is too much. Light, time, everything in the museum.

LOUISE

What?

NICK

Sorry.

LOUISE

About?

NICK

Before. I was--

LOUISE

Shut up.

NICK

Jesus. I've been sitting here mute all day, given that I can't speak more than ten words.

Then I try--

LOUISE

I don't believe you.

(Pause.)

NICK

Which part?

LOUISE

You're sorry.

(Mumbles in French, looks at her glass.)

NICK

You're right. Not much point in going on and on. I don't want to say anything, or want you to say anything, because none of this is your fault or mine or anybody's. It just is.

LOUISE

You're not making sense.

NICK

I'm tired of trying to.

LOUISE

Prick.

The light on stage is dimmed; the lights come up on M. and W. move from down left and right respectively.

W.

Jesus.

NICK

She looked away. Her face was in profile and there was a moment when I saw her head tossed back slightly, no pose or thought. Assurance, one could call it: composure, elegance. Distance.

W.

You were young.

M.

When we married. Not so young then.

W.

No.

M.

It had *been* something. What . . . Some secrets not only in her but in me, all those--

W.

This is--

M.

Evasive?

W.

Excessive.

M.

It's in his voice.

(Points at Nick.)

It had been something. Not just the . . .

W.

What? It's not a great myst--

M.

Mystery? About which any explanation is at best comical and at worst inane. Nothing new: slightly dressed up sensations. Fucking.

W.

Sad. And you were young.

M.

And I loved her. Once.

The lights shift again from M. and W. back to the stage; LOUISE speaks in French to the WAITER; NICK looks down at the table until she finishes, then finishes his drink in one gulp.

NICK

I thought I heard the word American in there.

LOUISE

Something stronger. For you.

(Pause.)

It's getting cold.

(She takes his hand and kisses it.)

Where do you want to have dinner?

NICK

I'm sorry--

LOUISE

Don't. Let's just--

(She waves at the city.)

--you know. This is enough for . . . It's a distraction, right? If not, *tant pis*.

NICK

Hey. I got that.

LOUISE

Good for you.

(The WAITER sets a tray down on the table.)

Drink up. He brought you something strong.

The lights shift slowly to M. and W. in the aisles as the stage goes black. LOUISE remains, seated at first, then stands behind her chair. NICK remains just outside the light, up left.

NICK

I admired her, her ease with everything that intimidated me, I don't know, not just the city but the whole fucking thing. I wanted to find . . .

W.

But.

NICK

I wasn't in love with her. I wanted to be, I admired her, I liked her, I wanted the best, all that shit, but--

W.

Jesus, just stop.

LOUISE leaves the stage, carries her chair; the lighting shifts as M. and W. cross the stage.

W. (CONT.)

But you didn't leave her. Not--

M.

No. I didn't know, I don't think I--

W.

You were married.

M.

It was before you.

W.

I know.

M.

Fuck. Cut it any way you want, I don't come out so well in this.

Music: "Ain't No Way." As M. and W. exit up stage, LOUISE and NICK enter down left and right; they cross on a dim stage and listen for a few seconds before they exit.

SCENE NINE

Music continues; NICK, left alone, sits at the table; W. barely in the light up right, M. in the aisle down left.

W.
And you . . . What more?

NICK
What do they think? Now.

W.
You can't know. You said before--with any luck, kindly or not at all.

NICK
There's that hope.

W.
"-- from shadowy regions and faces and bodies, the great loveliness of ghosts."

NICK
And this isn't--

W.
Epic? No.

NICK
He was terrified--Odysseus.

W.
By hordes of shades--not by the women.

NICK
No. They made him blue.

NICK exits up left; M. comes back onto the stage. W. and M.

are diagonally across the stage from each other at the start of the scene; M. crosses to her as they speak.

W.

Because he couldn't touch them.

(Laughs.)

This is how you keep nostalgia to a minimum?

As they speak, BERENICE, GIRL from the A.N.C.C. pool, S., LULU, JOHANNA, and RACHEL enter from all four exits. Music: "Black Books."

W. (CONT.)

Your procession.

The slide of the viaduct in Chaumont; snow. BERENICE steps into the light and smiles at M.; W. steps out of the light when other characters speak.

BERENICE

We did wonder sometimes what became of *les Américains* after you left, once the base was closed--it's an industrial park now, you were right about that. Once in a great while we thought about you, and yes, an afternoon in the snow with our parents stuttering in French and English. I remember certain things. *A bientôt, ma chéri.*

(She steps out of the light.)

M.

Whoa.

The GIRL and SARAH from SCENE TWO step in from different corners of the stage and smile at M. The slide changes to the pool at the A.N.C.C.)

GIRL

We're at the mercy of your, what shall I call it--overheated memories, yet here we are again, smoke and mirrors: "ideal, sun-bleached, compact." "Compact" I like, but you couldn't do better? Our fathers--*they* really were something, weren't they Nick? And now what have we inherited from them . . .

She exits as the slide changes to the loop of quarters at a base and SARAH steps into the light.

SARAH

Style points--I haven't forgotten about Curtis LeMay. That's one of the ironies of our childhood, hey Nick? There we were, stationed together just that once, but how did you put it? *That's where we're from.* Kids, curious, eager, innocent, and you're right--Generals row, *hot the way Washington summer nights are* . And Curtis LeMay. How do you forget that?

SARAH fades as the slide changes to the school from SCENE THREE.

M.

She didn't forget.

W.

Well. You remember. There's hope.

LULU steps into the light.

LULU

Well. Tough guy.

M.

What?

LULU

I was right, huh? Or we both were. You left, and they closed the base. And your dad--

M.

Yeah. Viet Nam.

LULU

He was--?

M.

Fine.

LULU

Most of the kids from here were too. A few, well. You can imagine.

M.

I don't even remember most of their names.

LULU

It's all right. I told you--

M.

I know, but you--I imagined--

LULU

That's just it. You imagined. A sweet kid in the U.P., huh?

M.

I never forgot--

LULU

No. There's that.

LULU exits; JOHANNA is in the light behind him, up left.

JOHANNA

Break a beer bottle a thousand miles away from me?

M.

Yeah. Well--

JOHANNA

What you wanted then--

M.

Just to stop?

JOHANNA

A little town, Highway 61, some Dylan dream? Sad, Nick.

M.

Cold, white, Northern blues. Partly the times, partly I was afraid--

JOHANNA

Of--

M.

Who knows. Anyway . . .

JOHANNA

What? We were young, we--

M.

Ah. I could get tired of hearing that.

JOHANNA

So we--

M.

Grew, evolved, took with us all those experiences, sought new ways to serve, isn't that how you put it? Yeah, well--right now I can't read too good, you know?

(Turns away, crosses down.)

JOHANNA stops for a second before she exits;
RACHEL and LOUISE enter together up left;
RACHEL crosses near M., smiles; LOUISE
crosses below them to their right and stands with
her back to them.

RACHEL

Same old fucked up Nick.

(W. laughs offstage.)

It's o.k., baby.

M.

Oh, God.

RACHEL

(Kisses him on the cheek.)

See you around.

RACHEL exits down left as LOUISE turns to
face M.; he avoids looking at her as he watches
RACHEL leave.

LOUISE

Thirty years?

M.

Something like that. I--

LOUISE

If you want redemption--

M.

Of course not.

LOUISE

There were things you said, things I thought were understood. You can't deny it.

M.

I don't.

LOUISE

Was it--

M.

Don't. There's no point. Now.

(Long pause.)

LOUISE

And that's that.

As LOUISE exits, the other women are briefly visible in the exits; M. notices some of them and then is left alone just upstage right of center. W. joins him. The slide of *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* is projected again; "Only One And Only" plays.

W.

Guilty?

M.

Hmm.

W.

Good.

M.

Thanks.

W.

No charming tales about later married life?

M.

No.

W.

Don't know if I'm grateful or relieved.

M.
So how much trouble--

W.
Speaking for myself or as a representative--?

M.
I don't know.

W.
Oh, there are problems, and you are fucked. But then that's where politics come in-- you're all fucked up, my love. The subject doesn't bring out the best in you--any of you. If only you hadn't dwelled quite so much on fucking, my dear. On behalf of women everywhere--

M.
All right. My apologies. So.

W.
It's not a question of trouble. I told you hours ago there were problems.

M.
Serial adultery, I think you mentioned.

W.
Nostalgia. You're in love with a series of young ghosts.

M.
A fucked up past.

W.
Which you said is never finished.

M.
You really don't let up.

W.
No. And as for your reasons--
(Points at the Manet.)
--you don't get her. You get me.

M.
Reason enough.
(Crosses to her and starts to dance.)

Very good. Now I want my dinner.

W.

He kisses her.

BLACKOUT as they dance