The Women

One Act Play Playwright: Fonde Taylor Copyright 2022 PH: 205.222.0836 Email: fondet@yahoo.com <u>Synopsis</u>: A lazy drunken artist is besieged by women from all sides- an angry girlfriend, a furious gallerist, two sisters and a few others. Some love him. Most hate him. The phone is ringing constantly with their calls. Meanwhile a blank canvas on his wall awaits him for a \$30,000 commission that is due in 48 hours. Bills are piling up, collectors are calling and the rent is past due. His response is one of silent indifference and more wine. Nothing short of a miracle will save him.

Cast:

Kolya (Koly) - artist named after Anton Chekhov's brother, early 30s, long hair, unkempt Puerto Rican Girl #1- attractive 25-35 year old (bit part) Puerto Rican Girl #2- same characteristics as Girl #1 Elizabeth- Kolya's girlfriend, 25 - 30, petite, pretty, preppy Dina- Kolya's older sister, late 30s, tough no bs kinda lady Child's voice (voice only)-Dina's child Sasha- Kolya's baby sister, 25-29 Momma- Kolya's mom Bella- gallery owner, Kolya's representative, this is the lead role, 50+ Parker Posey type Nancy- Bella's assistant, 30-35, professional in dress and demeanor, supporting role for Bella The Chorister (voice only)- an old sharecropper from 100 years past is calling from heaven Claude Levi-Strauss (voice only)- calling from the other world to deliver a lecture on procreation, an academic type, lecturing Bill Collector (voice only) The Client - older well-dressed lady, snob, entitled, arrogant Scene 1: The Breakup Scene 2: Bella

- Scene 3: Dina
- Scene 4: Mama & Sasha
- Scene 5: After Midnight
- Scene 6: Black & Blue
- Scene 7: A Beautiful Painting
- Scene 8: Moneybags
- Scene 9: Reconciliation

SET: a dingy one-room artist's efficiency apartment in 1979. There's a large bed at stage right for the bedroom area. The kitchen area is at stage left. There are two doors at rear wall. One is off center closer to the kitchen area. This is the entrance to the apartment. The second door is to the side of the bed at stage right. It represents the restroom door.

The kitchen area has counter, cabinets and sink, and it has a shabby little table with 3 chairs. In the bedroom area, there's a bedside table with a lamp and phone and answering machine. At rear wall, there's a dresser with a stereo and record albums piled to side of dresser on floor. Lots of paintings here and there, finished and unfinished, stacked against wall. An easel with an unfinished painting sits prominently.

A small area to the extreme left and right sides of the stage is set aside for phone callers and should remain dark until a person is calling at which time a spot light will come on. These areas shall be changed with each caller to represent that caller's unique space. For example an easy chair with a floor lamp for Mama; an office desk and chair with phone and Rolodex for Bella, etc. They should be kept very simple. The calls/callers alternate from stage left to stage right and back again with each successive caller.

LIGHTING: a soft light spreads over the whole set. Increase light or spotlight over the caller areas whenever they phone Kolya.

IMPORTANT NOTE: all of the dialogue in the first four scenes is spoken into a phone. The women in Kolya's life are all calling him and leaving messages on his answering machine. The women will be to either side of the stage in the background. When one of them calls, a spotlight will be directed at her. She can move about and gesticulate while talking into the phone. Her voice and actions should reflect the emotions she is feeling. It must have dramatic pulse and life.

Scene 1:

Birds chirping. Morning light streaming in through window across bed. Kolya is laying in bed with two Puerto Rican girls. Clothes are strewn across the floor at the foot of the bed. There's an empty bottle of wine on the floor and a full bottle on the table. A thick roll of artist canvas is propped in the corner. Puerto Rican Girl #1 gets out of bed and goes to bathroom. She is wearing one of Kolya's t-shirts. Kolya rolls to edge of bed, reaches down to pick up wine bottle, sees it's empty and lays it on the nightstand. Girl #1 comes back out goes to sink and gets a glass of water and sits on the edge of bed and starts running her hand through the hair of her friend, Puerto Rican girl #2. Girl #2 pushes her hand away. Girl #1 goes to albums and flips through them. Kolya gets out of bed and goes to restroom. He comes out and sits at table and rubs his head. Kolya's phone rings. Spot-light stage right reveals Elizabeth in her space with one hand on her hip and the other hand holding her phone. There is a defiant and hostile expression on her face. Kolya's answering machine picks up.

ELIZABETH

Kolya? (*pause*) Kolya? (*pause*) I know you're there. Fucker! Pick up, you coward. (*pause*) Ok, that's it mister! We're done! You got that? Huh? (*pause*). It's over. Don't call me! I never want to see your ugly fuckface again.

[KOLYA STARES AT PHONE, POURS GLASS OF WINE, DRINKS IT ALL IN ONE SWILL. GIRL #1 COMES OVER AND RUBS HIS SHOULDERS. HE POURS ANOTHER GLASS AND HANDS IT TO HER. GIRL #2 ROLLS OUT OF BED WEARING ONLY HER PANTIES. PHONE RINGS]

ELIZABETH

Oh, and just so you know, I know about last night. I saw you and your bitches. Disgusting pervert! I hate you. I hope you got something. I hope it's something nasty that won't wash off.

[KOLYA CONTINUES DRINKING. PHONE RINGS.]

ELIZABETH

One more thing --- your paintings SUCK!

[GIRL #1 AND GIRL #2 GIGGLING AND DRESSING AND CHATTING IN SPANISH. GIRL #1 COMES AND KISSES HIM. GIRL #2 COMES AND KISSES HIM. THEY GO TO DOOR, SMILE, WAVE AND EXIT].

[PHONE RINGS. ANSWERING MACHINE PICKS UP.]

ELIZABETH

(sobbing) You FUCKER! I hate you. (sobbing) Why are you such a jerk? I loved you. I thought you loved me. When we made love you always looked into my eyes like I was special and you really cared. (*long pause, crying, sobbing*) There was something else. I couldn't figure it out. Something hiding behind those grey eyes. I think that was what drew me to you. That mystery. But I never felt close to you either so maybe this needed to happen. Still it hurts. Love hurts. It really hurts. (*pause*) What's wrong with you anyway? Why can't you love me? Is it so difficult? There's nothing wrong with me. I'm smart. I'm not chubby chunky. I'm pretty. Unlike you, I have a REAL job. (*soft crying*) Bastard! I hate you! I love you! I want to kill you. (*CLICK...*)

[KOLYA STARES AT PHONE. 30 SECONDS PASS. PHONE RINGS AND ANSWERING MACHINE PICKS UP.]

ELIZABETH

I know what your problem is. You're incapable of love. Because you're a selfish self-centered shit and you love only yourself. I'm so glad we're broke up. I can't imagine anything worse than spending the rest of my life with you. Fuck you, you ugly pervert!

[KOLYA PICKS UP BOTTLE OF WINE, FINISHES IT AND PASSES OUT ON TABLE. AFTER 30 SECONDS, THE PHONE RINGS AGAIN. KOLYA SLEEPS THROUGH AS THE ANSWERING MACHINE PICKS UP CALL.]

Voice of a CHORISTER

(singing in baritone) Swing low sweet chariot Comin' for to carry me home Swing low sweet chariot Comin' for to carry me home I looked over Jordan and what did I see Comin' for to carry me home A band of angels comin' after me Comin' for to carry me home

LIGHTS

Scene 2:

Stage is blacked out. Phone rings. Lights up---softer--- to represent late afternoon of the same day. Kolya is still passed out at his kitchen table. He stirs and lifts his head and mumbles. Bella is in caller's area at stage left. She's pacing and holding the phone in one hand and the receiver in the other. There is a small table and chair near her with her Rolodex, appointment book and purse resting on it. A bottle of red wine and wine glass are sitting there too.

BELLA

Kolya? Hey Kolya? Are you there? Hey little buddy, it's me Bella. Pick up! You know why I'm calling. Pick up the phone little buddy. (pause) Okay have it your way. I know you're there and I know you're listening so here it is. It's been over three months now and I haven't heard from you. The client called today and dog cussed me. Listen up little buddy, I'm not going to take her shit anymore. I'm not covering for you. If the bitch calls again, I'm giving her your number. She can abuse your stupid ass. You deserve it. You really do. What the hell are you doing anyway? I bet you're hungover and lying in bed, huh? (beat) Hey. you know what? I'm coming over there. I'm going to pour a bucket of ice cold water on your stupid head. Get up damnit! Get your sorry good for nothing lazy ass outta bed and do the painting! Please Kolya for God's sake please paint this stupid painting. Come on. What the hell? We gave you three months. And now it's three months and three weeks and we have NOTHING. (*long pause*). Hey—hey little buddy, listen--- (very long pause) ---Did you hear that? SILENCE- that was silence. Silence sounds like nothing doesn't it? And that's what you get if you don't do this painting. (beat) Fucking idiot! God, Im so angry right now. I wish I was there, I'd strangle you. (she's breathing heavy and slams her fist into the table) Ow! Goddamnit. (screams to Nancy her assistant) Nancy bring me my nervous pills! Hurry for God's sake.

> [NANCY RUSHES IN FROM STAGE LEFT WITH PILL BOTTLE AND A GLASS OF WATER. BELLA EXCHANGES PHONE AND RECEIVER FOR THE PILLS AND WATER. SHE FUMBLES WITH THE PILL BOTTLE, DROPS IT, CUSSES, RETRIEVES IT, OPENS IT AND THROWS A COUPLE OF PILLS IN AND REACHES FOR THE GLASS OF WATER, SETS IT BACK ON THE TABLE AND PICKS UP A BOTTLE OF WINE AND WASHES THE PILLS DOWN. SHE SITS AT THE TABLE, TAKES A FEW DEEP BREATHS AND PICKS UP THE PHONE.]

BELLA

(*continuing*) Hey-ASSHOLE, you still there? Did you hear all that? I have to take pills because of idiots like you. (*pause-deep breathing*) Okay,,,,, so listen up. Here's how it is. I'm going to give you specific instructions here cause you're just like a little child. And children need hand holding so I'm going to hold your little hand and I want you to do the following:

- 1. Get out of bed (pause). I'm waiting
- 2. Okay now go lock the door (pause)
- 3. Go pee and splash some water on your face (pause)
- 4. Go to your grimy little kitchen, clean out the coffee pot and make a pot of coffee
- 5. STOP! Get away from that chair—DO NOT sit down!
- 6. Okay, good. Now while the coffee is brewing I want you to roll out the primed canvas I left you and cut it at 13 feet, take the canvas and stretch it out and tack it to the wall. (*pause*) Do it now!
- 7. I know you've forgotten the details so take out a pen and paper and write this down. Ready now? Okay dear, the dimensions are 96 inches by 236 inches
- 8. Now I want you to paint an all over painting to fit these dimensions, okeydokey? Paint anything you want. Anything! Isn't that nice? Yes sweetie, it's so nice and so easy. Easy easy easy peasy.

BELLA

(*continues*) So there you have it. It's so easy an idiot could do it. But not just any idiot. Just one. Only you my dear! Hmmm, what else? Okay, well I guess that's it. (*pause*) No wait-- wait! Just one more thing here. Listen damnit. This is important. When I hang up, I want you to take the phone off the hook and don't put it back on till you have finished the painting, okay? You got that little buddy? Take the damn phone off the hook and leave it off until you have finished. And then call me when you're done. (*pause*) Koly, you can do this painting. I know you can. Okay? So do it- Now!

> [LIGHT DIMS OVER BELLA'S SPACE. KOLYA GETS UP AND STARTS FOLLOWING THE DIRECTIONS. AFTER HE HAS STRETCHED THE CANVAS ACROSS THE WALL, HE SITS IN A CHAIR WITH A CUP OF COFFEE AND STARES AT THE BLANK CANVAS.]

LIGHTS OUT, PAUSE 10 SECONDS, LIGHTS ON

[KOLYA IS SITTING LIKE BUDDHA FACING THE CENTER OF THE CANVAS AND ROLLING A RUBBER BALL TO THE WALL UNDER IT. IT HITS WALL AND ROLLS BACK AND HE REPEATS THIS OVER AND OVER.]

REPEAT LIGHTS OUT FOR 10 SECONDS AND THEN BACK ON

[KOLYA IS SITTING IN CHAIR BOUNCING A BALL]

REPEAT LIGHTS OUT AND ON

[KOLYA IS BACK SITTING BHUDDA LIKE STARING AT THE CANVAS.]

QUICK LIGHTS OFF AND ON

[KOLYA IS LAYING ON THE FLOOR ASLEEP. PHONE RINGS. HE IS STARTLED AND STIRS AWAKE.]

BILL COLLECTOR'S VOICE

Hello, this is Hancock Light and Power calling. We are calling in regards to your past due account. It is now 90 days in arrears. Please call us at your earliest convenience to avoid disconnection of your power. The phone number is 666.2345.

[KOLYA STANDS, STRETCHES AND POURS A CUP OF COFFEE. HE COMES AND STANDS BEFORE THE STRETCHED CANVAS, WALKS FROM END TO END, BACKS UP AND LOOKS AT IT. PUTS THE COFFEE CUP ON THE TABLE. MAKES A LINE IN THE AIR WITH HIS RIGHT HAND AND THEN ANOTHER ONE WITH HIS LEFT HAND. PAUSES AND THEN REACHES FOR A ROLLER AND BEGINS ROLLING THE CANVAS WITH BLACK PAINT. THE PHONE RINGS. SPOT LIGHT ON BELLA.]

BELLA

Hey! What the fuck? I thought I told you to take the phone off the hook. Listen, the client just called again. She's called three times today cussing and raising hell. She's giving us 48 hours to deliver her painting. Did you hear that? (*goes into rambling rant*) Jesus! 48 hours. Oh my God! This is not good. We are so fucked!it's your fault. It's all your goddamned fault. (*pause, heavy breathing, hyperventilating, continues ranting*) Christ I can't take this shit anymore you are killing me all you idiots and flakes you're just like the rest you guys never finish anything Dad warned me 'Don't open a gallery Bella,' he said 'Don't you know about

artists--they never finish anything!' that's exactly what he said, the words out of his mouth. Why didn't I listen? Oh Fuck Me! (pause, groaning) Look at me Kolya! Look! (pause) I used to be good looking. I didn't swear and use foul language. I didn't yell and scream. I was a good person. Now look what you've done to me. Pill popping wine drinking thin as a rail dark circles under my eyes. I haven't had sex in a year. I'm a wreck. And it's all your fault. You stupid bastard. You and the rest of 'em. Jesus God help me! 48 hours. 48- (stops, looks all around, retrieves pill bottle) What is this. These aren't my pills. (holds it close trying to read the prescription, shakes it) Fuck it! (pops it open, takes a couple and drinks them down.) Okay, okay. So here it is Koly-- listen to me. Listen closely. I need you to pull a rabbit out of your ass. We have got to have the painting ready in 2 days. You have to do it. I know you don't care about yourself. Good. I don't care about you either. In fact I don't give a shit about you. But I DO want you to care about me. Do it for me. You're all I got here. This other stuff. It's----hmmm, uh --- (pausewhispering) Okay, what the hell, I've never told anyone this and if you repeat it I'll kill you. This stuff the rest of this art here. It's---its not good. In fact it's horrible. Ok there I said it. Not a word though or I will cut off your balls, you understand. Are you listening to me? (pause) Pick up the phone. Pick it up. NOW! (pause) ASSHOLE!

[KOLYA CONTINUES ROLLING THE PAINTING IN BLACK. PHONE RINGS.]

BELLA

(calm) Hey there little buddy. Me again. Listen, Im sorry I lost my temper. I didn't mean to call you an asshole. You know that, right? You're still my little buddy. You always were and always will be, okay? (pause, pondering, takes a big sip) Oh hey – so I have some very good news for you. I wasn't going to tell you about this cause I was so angry but I can't hold it back any longer. So here it is. The other day, this pompous and arrogant guy came into the gallery. "I'm Pierre St. John from New York,' he says all hoighty toighty. 'You represent an artist by the name of Kolya Kolyavich?" And I said, "Yes, he's one of our top artists, I have one of his pieces out and some in the back room. Please follow me and I'll show you." We're walking along and this guy's so impressed with himself and he's rambling on about apocalyptic abstract visionary trends, the end of the century, societal breakdowns, and one thing or the other---all this intellectual highbrow nonsense and I'm thinking oh God here we go again another blowhard with too much education and no money. But I bit my tongue and took him back to the rear gallery to show him *Manic Depression* and he stopped jabbering and just stood there silently like in a trance. So now it was my turn for talking and I told him a little about you but I realized he wasn't listening. So I was quiet and I turned and looked at the painting too and by the way it is a lovely painting. And then the phone rang so I walked back up to answer and when I finished the call, I turned and there he is this St. Pierre guy in my face holding out his card and he asks me to have you call him cause he wants to interview you for a magazine article and then he leaves and I look down at his card and OH MY GOD, the guys from ArtForum. YES, Yes Yes, ArtFuckingForum! I mean like this is it, this is the big time, the big break you know. This is what we've been waiting for. This is it. It doesn't get any better. You've made it Koly. No more

shitty day jobs, no more waiting tables or whatever you've been doing for last 10 years. This is big big time little buddy. Your paintings will be going for \$50-\$100,000. And now all you have to do is just paint. Pick up the paint brushes and paints and do your thing. Start with this one painting. Let's deliver it to the client who by the way has become a nasty old bitch, but that's ok, let's deliver it to old moneybags and get your first big check and get you in touch with this St. Pierre from ARtForum and the art world is yours my dear. All yours. Ok?

[WHILE SHE HAS BEEN TALKING KOLYA HAS BEEN PAINTING. HE FINISHES PAINTING THE CANVAS IN A BLACK GROUND. HE GOES TO THE LITTLE TABLE AND POURS A GLASS OF WINE AND SITS STARING AT THE PAINTING. THE PHONE RINGS.]

BELLA

Koly? (pause) Hey. Me again. I know it's late. I hope Im not disturbing you. I (pause-then softly) -well-- uh I had to call. I've been thinking about something. I-- know you live alone. And I'm alone too you know? Or maybe you didn't but I am. My husband and I are separated. It happened a few weeks ago. He left me. He said I was crazy. Said I talk too much. Huh-- Can you believe that? And - crazy? Who's crazy! Hell, he comes home every night walking around in his boxers, sitting in his barc-a-lounger for hours drinking beer, belching farting watching TV. He never wanted to go out or do anything. He never wanted to have sex. And the few occasions we did it was all mechanical. I mean he looked like he was riding a hobby horse. It was sad and crummy. (beat) Oh God, I don't know. We had a good thing for a few years but he just lost his spark or something. Maybe I'm to blame too. I know I've gotten mean lately. It's stress you know? But still I want more from a man. I don't care about sports and TV. I want some passion and romance. (pause) Hmmm, well, it's ok though. We just grew apart. It happens. There wasn't any love left. Nothing to keep the marriage together. So there you have it. And we move on. I just wish he hadn't called me crazy. (pause) Hmmm-- Umm, why was I telling you all this? (pause-scratching her head, looking up) God I'm so mixed up right now. Maybe I am crazy. Crazy and lonely. OH, yeah,,, that's what I was talking about. It's about being lonely. I was thinking about you last night. I was all alone at home in bed reading and drinking a glass of wine and I started thinking about people being alone because it's something I've never known till my husband left me. And I started crying cause I was thinking about you and how lonely you must be. I don't want you to be lonely, ok, cause I,,,,I care about you, see. I really do. I know I'm loud and cussing and all but I've got a heart and it was tearing up last night over you, sitting there in your grimy little one room place with all the crummy furniture and stuff. I don't want you to be sad and lonely okay? So if, uh, umm, I mean if you want some company, well you're always welcome to come over here or I'll come there if you want. Well--maybe not your place. No offense but your place is a little too dirty and smelly for a lady, you

know? But we could go to a hotel somewhere out of town. Whatever you want. Okay? (*pause*) Will you think about it, please? (*she puts her fingers to her lips and touches the receiver*). Koly? (*pause-whispering*) I think I love you!

CURTAIN

Scene 3:

End of day. Kolya is sitting on floor in front of the painting like Buddha. It's still just a black canvas. Phone rings. Light comes up on Elizabeth at stage right.

ELIZABETH

(Holding phone. Begins sobbing softly. Hangs up phone.)

[LIGHT DIMS OVER ELIZABETH'S AREA. KOLYA SITS STARING AT CANVAS. A MINUTE PASSES. PHONE RINGS. LIGHT SPOTS ON DINA AT STAGE LEFT.]

DINA

Dude! Elizabeth just called. She's pretty torn up. Two Puerto Rican girls, huh? (*chuckling*) Funny. I didn't think you had it in you. Well I hope you had fun. Anyway so Dina called and we talked. I told her to forget about you- 'Look at him,' I said, 'He's a freak!' Sure he's a nice guy and all but nice doesn't pay the bills. He hasn't worked in 10 years. He can't even support himself. Do you want to support him? And yourself too? So yeah, well, and I told her to move on, find somebody else. Preferably somebody with a job. (*pause*) There was something else. (*pause*) Oh yeah! Don't forget Momma's birthday Friday. And don't be late! And don't come in crying about your \$30,000 commission and your deadline and all that crap. We don't care about your art shit anymore. (*chuckling*) Fact is, nobody does. Why don't you get a job for God's sake?

> [DINA HANGS UP. KOLYA LAYS ON FLOOR. PROPS HIS HEAD ON HIS HAND AND STARES AT THE PAINTING. PHONE RINGS.]

DINA

HEY! By the way, I need that two hundred dollars I loaned you. Bring it Friday. Cash! I need it. You told me you'd pay me back a month ago—

Voice of DINA'S CHILD

MOM! DAD! COME WIPE!

DINA

(mumbling disgust)

DINA'S CHILD

MOM! DAD!

DINA

(mocking in kid's voice) Come wipe! Come wipe! COME WIPE MY ASS!

DINA'S CHILD

MOM! Come wipe.

DINA

(shouts) In a minute! (pause) Funny isn't it? Your nephew here, little Koly, your namesake, he's kinda like you. (chuckling) Always wanting somebody to hold his hand and wipe his ass. (laughing). Ok better go now. Don't be late to the birthday. If you are, I swear to God I will drag you out to the backyard and kick your ass. (chuckles) You know you could use a good ass kicking!

[KOLYA LAYS ON FLOOR. A MINUTE PASSES. PHONE RINGS.]

Voice of CHORISTER

(singing) I'm sometimes up and sometimes down Coming for to carry me home But still my soul feels heavenly bound Coming for to carry me home

CURTAIN

Scene 4:

Darkness. Only a nightlight is on. The room is empty. Phone rings. Light comes up at stage left to reveal Momma calling.

MAMA

Koly? (*pause*) Koleyyy dear? Woohoo? How's my miracle baby? Have you finished your painting? I hope so. I know it will be wonderful. (*voice lowers*) I hope they are paying you enough. Koley dear! I worry about you. You don't look so good. You've lost weight and you've gotten so pale. Please take care of yourself. You're my only baby boy. I made up a batch of chicken soup. Come see your Momma and get soup dear. Oh, how are you and Elizabeth? She's such a sweet and pretty girl. I hope you two can get married. You would have such beautiful babies. (*pause*) Well I guess you heard about Sasha and Billy. So sad they broke up. You should call her. Try to cheer her up. Uh oh, the rice is burning. I have to go. Bye.

[LIGHT DIMS OVER MAMA'S AREA. A FEW MOMENTS PASS, DOOR OPENS, LIGHTS COME ON. KOLYA ENTERS WITH A BOTTLE OF WINE IN A BROWN BAG. HE SETS IT DOWN ON THE TABLE AND RETRIEVES A GLASS. OPENS THE BOTTLE AND POURS A GLASS OF WINE AND WALKS UP TO THE PAINTING. HE WALKS AROUND LOOKING AT IT FROM DIFFERENT ANGLES STOPPING OCCASSIONALLY AND TAKING A SIP OF WINE. PHONE RINGS. LIGHT COMES UP STAGE RIGHT TO REVEAL SASHA CALLING.]

SASHA

Hey sweetie, it's me Sasha. Sorry to call so late. Dina called. She told me about you and Elizabeth. I'm really sorry. I like her. Maybe you should let things cool off and call her in a day or two. I hope you can patch it up. (pause) Hey I don't know if you heard the news but me and Billy broke up. He finally went to the doctor. The doctor told him he was CO-DEPENDENT and that he had ADD and OCD and BOMBASTICISM and DELUSIONISM and NARCISSISM and well I can't remember all the things he said. It was heartbreaking. Billy said he felt like he might as well go jump off a cliff. I was terrified he might hurt himself. I called his Mom and they

took him to a hospital. He's been there a few weeks. Gosh I've never felt more calmness and joy since he went in. And then I decided this was a sign. I mean I realized it was time for me to let go. It was just so much heaviness all the time with us. I care about him but now I know I really don't love him and I had to tell him. So I went and talked to him at the hospital yesterday. I told him we needed to go our own ways. I told him he should focus on his health. Oh my God you wouldn't believe how he freaked out - screaming and throwing things and calling me names. A couple of orderlies came and restrained him. It was really scary. They told me I needed to leave. I didn't want to hurt him. I felt guilty at first but I know it was the right thing to do. Please say a prayer for him. (*pause*) Well I guess that's about it. Call me sometime. Lovey dovey!

[KOLYA SITS AT TABLE AND DRINKS. PHONE RINGS.]

SASHA

Hey, I almost forgot. How's your big painting coming along. I know it will be beautiful. I'm very proud of you. You're a great artist. Stay with it. It's going to pay off. I know it will. Ok, well its late. I'll go now. Don't forget Momma's birthday party. Lovey dovey!

[KOLYA SITS AT TABLE STARING AHEAD. PHONE RINGS. LIGHT ON ELIZABETH AT STAGE LEFT HOLDING PHONE]

ELIZABETH

(moaning, sobbing softly) Im sorry I said all those hateful things. (sobbing) I love you! I miss you! (falls apart crying)

[KOLYA STANDS, TAKES BOTTLE, TAKES A BIG SWILL AND GOES TO TURN LIGHT OUT. HE GOES TOWARDS THE BED AND SITS ON THE SIDE. PHONE RINGS. NO CALLER SPACE IS INDICATED FOR 'THE PROFESSOR VOICE'. IT IS MERELY A RANDOM PHONE CALL COMING OUT OF THE BLUE WITHOUT REFERENCE.]

Voice of CLAUDE LEVI-STRAUSS

....'The first imperative of a human society is to reproduce itself, to maintain itself over time. Every society therefore possesses a rule of filiation defining how each new member belongs to the group; a kinship system determining the way that relations will be classified, as kin by blood or by marriage; and rules stipulating who a person can and cannot marry. Every society must also possess mechanisms to handle sterility. The problem of sterility has become a pressing issue in Western societies, ever since the invention of artificial methods to assist in reproduction. It is now possible – or, for certain procedures, it will be possible in the near future – for a couple, one or both of whose members are infertile, to have children through the use of various methods: artificial insemination, egg donation, the use of surrogate mothers for hire or free of cost, the freezing of embryos, in vitro fertilization with sperm from the husband of from another man and with an egg from the wife or another woman. The child born of such procedures may have one father and one mother as usual, or one mother and two fathers, two mothers and one father, two mothers and two fathers, three mothers and one father, or even three mothers and two fathers, when the sperm donor is not the father and when three women participate: the one donating an egg, the one providing her uterus, and the one who will be the child's legal mother. We are also faced with situations where a woman asks to be inseminated with the frozen sperm of her deceased husband, or where two lesbians have a child together by taking the egg of one, artificially fertilized by an anonymous donor, and implanting it in the other woman's uterus. There is also no reason, it seems, why the frozen sperm of a great-grandfather could not be used a century later to fertilize a greatgranddaughter. The child would then be his mother's granduncle and his own greatgrandfather's half brother. The problems that have arisen are of two orders, one legal in nature, the other psychological and moral.....' (VOICE TRAILS OFF)

CURTAIN

Scene 5:

After midnight. Kolya's room is dark. Light comes up on side of stage revealing Bella pacing back and forth in her nightgown. She has a remote phone in her hand. She stops and dials a number. A groggy voice answers.

Bella

Nancy! Nancy! Wake up. *(pause)* Get dressed. We're going to Kolya's. *(pause)* NO! It can't wait till tomorrow. Get dressed. I'll be there in 30 minutes.

Scene 6:

Morning. Kolya is lying passed out on the bed with a wine bottle in his hand. Knock on door. Pause. Knocking continues. Voices from other side. The knocking becomes a pounding. Door handle turns and Bella and her assistant Nancy come in. Bella looks around, sees unfinished painting on wall. She stares in shock. She drops her purse and then drops to her knees sobbing. After a few moments, she leans over and is softly beating the floor with her fists. Kolya stirs and is heard mumbling. Bella hears him, stops and stands up, wipes her eyes and straightens herself, leans down to pick up her purse and walks to the bed and proceeds to beat Kolya with her purse.

BELLA

(screaming) Goddamn you! YOU---You Idiot! (with each whack of her purse she yells the next word) You (whack) STUPID. (whack) FUCKING. (whack) IDIOT! (whack) You are a dead man. (whack) I WILL KILL you! (she continues beating him and then throws her purse to the side and gets over him straddling his torso and begins strangling him.)

> [NANCY RUSHES OVER AND PULLS HER OFF. BELLA COLLAPSES TO THE SIDE OF THE BED EXHAUSTED. NANCY GETS BELLA A GLASS OF WATER AND THEN GOES TO CHECK ON KOLYA.]

NANCY

(Poking at Kolya. Kolya doesn't move. She puts her hand on Kolya's shoulder and gently tries to rouse him. She checks him for a pulse and jumps back in horror crying out). Oh my God!

(muffled voice- unintelligible)	BELLA
I think you've killed him.	NANCY
(raising her head) Huh? What?	BELLA
He's not breathing.	NANCY

BELLA

(frightened. Moves up close to Kolya, touches him and then shakes him) Kolya? KOLYA! Wake up. Come on little buddy, wake up. (she shakes him more vigorously and then slaps him)

(stirs, mumbling, in pain) Uhnnnn!

BELLA

KOLYA

(rubbing his head) He's ok. He's ok.

NANCY

(sobbing) Oh thank goodness. I was --- so frightened.

BELLA

Its ok,,,,, he's ok. (Kolya's head is in her lap. She is stroking his hair) Get him some water.

NANCY

Okay.

BELLA

Here. (Nancy brings water to her and she holds Kolya up and gives him some) Ok now you take him.

[BELLA THROWS KOLYA OFF AND GETS UP AND STRAIGHTENS HERSELF. SHE BEGINS PACING AND MUMBLING TO HERSELF. SHE GOES TO KITCHEN AND RETRIEVES A BEER. GOES TO SIT AT DINING TABLE, OPENS BEER AND CHUGS IT. WIPES HER MOUTH AND SITS STARING AT THE PAINTING. SHE LOOKS AT THE CHAIR NEXT TO HER. THERE IS A PAINTING SMOCK/APPRON LAYING THERE. SHE LOOKS AT THE CANVAS AND THE APRON. SHE TAKES ANOTHER CHUG OF THE BEER AND GETS UP AND TAKES HER SWEATER OFF. SHE GOES TO THE PHONE AND TAKES IT OFF THE HOOK AND THEN SHE RETURNS TO THE TABLE AND PUTS THE APRON ON. SHE CHUGS THE REST OF THE BEER AND WALKS TOWARDS THE CANVAS. SHE STANDS FOR A MOMENT OR TWO AND OPENS THE PAINT CANS THAT ARE SITTING ON A LITTLE ROLLING TABLE AGAINST THE

WALL NEAR THE CANVAS. SHE PICKS UP A PAINT BRUSH, DIPS IT IN ONE OF THE CANS AND BEGINS A LONG SLASHING STROKE ACROSS THE CANVAS.]

NANCY

What-- What are you doing?

(silence)

Bella!

BELLA I'm painting this fucking painting. That's what I'm doing.

NANCY But-BELLA lt's ok. NANCY I didn't know you painted. BELLA

I don't.

NANCY

Do you know how? Have you ever painted?

BELLA

I did in kindergarten--- Finger painting. (she plunges her hand in one the paint cans and pulls it out dripping with paint. She smears and swirls some on the canvas with her hand and fingers. She swirls it around in a kind of gestural manner.)

	NANCY
finds out?	
	BELLA

She won't.

What if the client

NANCY

I don't know. (pause) This doesn't feel right.

BELLA

(*stops, wipes her hands on her apron and turns to* Nancy) Look! Nancy, sweetheart, the gallery is at the edge of bankruptcy. If we don't deliver a painting to ol' moneybitch tomorrow, we will both be out of a job. My father loaned me \$50,000 to get this business up and running. I can't

afford to fail. This gallery is all I got. (*pointing to Kolya*) Look at this idiot. Is he in any shape to do this painting?

NANCY

(looking down at Kolya, rubs his head, looks up at Bella and shakes her head to say no)

BELLA

No hell no. He can't even get out of bed. He probably doesn't even know where he is. The stupid bastard. (*pause*) So here we are. (*pause---continues*) And the way I see it is if this drunken idiot can paint a painting, so can I.

NANCY

But the client--- I mean what if Kolya tells her he didn't do it? Won't we get in trouble?

BELLA

(*walks over to Kolya, shakes him a little*) Hey Kolya? Koly dear? Are you gonna tell the client that I painted the painting?

KOLYA

BELLA

(*mumbling incoherently*)

I think he said no. Didn't he say no?

NANCY

I don't know. It sounded like mumbling to me.

BELLA

Nancy. Look at him? He hasn't answered his phone in a week. He's passed out drunk.

NANCY

Oh my! This is terrible.

BELLA

Terrible? I'll tell you terrible. It's a loser artist not delivering. It's clients cussing and screaming at you for commissions that don't get delivered. It's the whole damn art business. That's

what's terrible. Its full of freaks and deadbeats. (*pause*) Now! Listen up, you just lay back and take a little nap with the little king baby there and I'm going to do his painting and everything will be ok.

KOLYA

(stirs, starts to sit up)

BELLA

(*rushes over to him*) Whoa,,,,, whoa there little buddy. Here ya go. (*gives him some water*) You had a rough night. Lay back down there now. Mommy's here to take care of you. There, there now, lay back and get some rest. (*she runs to table and opens purse and retrieves pill bottle and tosses to Nancy*) Here, give him a couple of these.

What are they?

BELLA

BELLA

Seconal.

NANCY

But he's been drinking.

BELLA

(*laughing*) So have I. Its ok. I do it every night. I take 2 and wash 'em down with half a bottle of red wine. It'll give him the best sleep of his life.

NANCY

I don't know. (stroking his hair) What if he doesn't wake up?

BELLA

(sighs, crosses over to them) Give me the Goddamn damn pills. (pulls his head up) Kolya, Koly dear, wake up, here baby, here you go. (feeds him a couple of pills and some wine) There you go, good boy, drink it down, take your medicine. (she shoves his head back into Nancy's lap and gets up) Look at him. (chuckling) Little baby. Wah Wah! Lets give baby a pacifier. Or a big teat. A wet nurse with a big fat teat, that's what he needs. (walks away) Jesus!

NANCY

(stroking his hair) He's beautiful. He just seems so vulnerable.

BELLA

(*laughing*) Hey! He doesn't need pity, not from you or anyone. He needs 30 days in a drunk tank. If you want to pity somebody, give it to me cause I've got a \$30,000 dollar painting to

paint for his drunk ass and I've got less than 24 hours to do it. (gets a paintbrush, loads it with red paint and moves towards the canvas)

CURTAIN

Scene 7:

Curtains open to sunlit room, middle of next day. Bella is at the little dining table, her head laying on her arms on the table. Kolya and Nancy are fully clothed and asleep in bed. The painting is finished and it's a beautiful abstract in the manner of the American abstract expressionists. There's a knocking on door, Bella wakes and goes and opens. Sasha is there.

SASHA

Oh! (startled) I'm sorry. I must have knocked on the wrong door.

BELLA It's ok. (rubbing sleep from her eyes) Who are you looking for?

SASHA

I'm looking for Kolya Kolyavich.

BELLA

He's here. This is his apartment. Who are you?

SASHA

I'm Sasha, his sister.

BELLA

Oh yes, forgive me, here-- come in. (moves from door) I'm Bella. (they shake hands) I represent Kolya.

SASHA

Oh how lovely. I've heard so much about you. (steps in, turns and sees painting and gasps and puts hand to her mouth.) Oh my, it's beautiful!

BELLA

Thank-- uh Yes, it is. Very beautiful. (Bella moves off to restroom)

SASHA

(sees Kolya and moves towards the bed) Koley, Kolya sweetie, it's me Sasha. Koly wake up. (Kolya stirs)

KOLYA

(sits up, rubbing head) Hmmm. God, my head. It's killing me.

SASHA

KOLYA

How did you get all these bruises? Did you get into a fight?

I don't know. I don't think so. I blacked out. I, I can't remember anything.

SASHA

KOLYA

SASHA

Who is she? (nods toward Nancy)

Huh?

(nods towards Nancy again)

KOLYA

(blinks, rubs his eyes) I have no idea. I've never seen her before.

, BELLA

Its ok. That's Nancy. She's my assistant. We came to pick up the painting.

SASHA

Why is she in bed with Kolya?

BELLA

NANCY

We were waiting for him to wake up. She was just taking a nap. It was a long drive and we're both a little tired. (*moves to wake Nancy*) Nancy, hey Nancy, wake up.

Hmmm..... (yawning and stretching, she moves to sit on edge of bed)

Hop up.

NANCY

BELLA

Hmmm...in a minute, please, just a litte more.

BELLA Come on, we have to go. (*pause, turns to Kolya*) Good morning Kolya.

(surprised) Bella? What-

KOLYA

BELLA

I'm here to pick up the painting. Don't you remember? I told you I was coming.

Oh yeah, well I'm sorry I didn't fin-	KOLYA	
It's GORGEOUS!	BELLA	
What is?	KOLYA	
The painting. It's beautiful.	BELLA	
(looks around, sees painting, rubs his eyes). Id	KOLYA id that?	
(<i>laughing</i>) If you didn't then who did?	BELLA	
(up and moving towards the painting) Wow	KOLYA	
	BELLA	
It's no wonder,, there were wine bottles everywhere. You must've painted it in a drunken stupor. I don't know how you did it but it's beautiful. (<i>to Nancy who has come up beside her</i>) Maybe he should drink more often.		

What?	
I	BELLA
When he's painting you know?	
S	SASHA
(protective) No, he shouldn't. (goes up next to work—ever.	<i>Kolya</i>) It's so beautiful, Koly. I think it's your best
k Thanks. I don't remember doing it but it is nic	KOLYA ce.
Ves it is And all it needs is a signature	BELLA

NANCY

Yes it is. And all it needs is a signature.

Oh, right. Yes that's a good idea.

BELLA (moving towards phone). If you don't mind, I'll invite her to come look at it.

Yeah, sure, ok. Let me clean up and shave and straighten up around here first.

BELLA

25

KOLYA

Yes, that would be nice.

[BELLA MAKES CALL AND PANTOMINES A DISCUSSION ON THE PHONE. KOLYA AND SASHA ARE STANDING IN FRONT OF THE PAINTING.]

KOLYA

(backs up,,,stares at it, tilts head, shakes it a little, mumbles something unintelligible)

BELLA Do you want to varnish it? KOLYA (*distracted*) Huh?

It's a masterpiece! I know the client will like it.

slowly)

Varnish, do you want to varnish it?

KOLYA

No, no. Its ok like it is. Are you taking it today?

BELLA No we should let it dry for a few days. I'll call the client though. Today was the deadline you know.

KOLYA

BELLA

BELLA

KOLYA Yes, yes. Okay. (he retrieves paintbrush and dips it in the black paint and signs it carefully and SASHA

(gives him a side hug) I'm so proud of you.

Thank you. It's so strange.

No-- no, it's beautiful.

KOLYA No, I mean it's.... Well I don't know. I'm still a little confused.

SASHA Well don't be. The painting is finished and it's beautiful and now you need to get cleaned up. Go shower and shave and I'll straighten up the apartment.

Okay. Yes, of course.

(finishing conversation, hangs up phone) The client is very excited. She's going to come over at 6.

Great! I'll be ready.

So we'll see you then. Nancy, let's go. (*they exit*)

CURTAIN

KOLYA

SASHA

BELLA

KOLYA

KOLYA

BELLA

Scene 8:

Several hours later around 6 pm. Knocking on door. A pause. Knocking continues louder. Murmurring on other side of door. Handle turns and door opens. Bella, Nancy and the Client come in. Bella turns on light to reveal cleaned apartment. Bella looks around for Kolya. The Client moves towards the painting.

BELLA

(finds a note on the table, reads). "Dear Bella, We are celebrating my mother's birthday tonight. I'm very sorry I couldn't stick around. Please make yourself at home. I hope your client is happy with the painting. Will talk soon. Kolya." Oh, isn't that nice? He's celebrating his mother's birthday. Such a nice man.

THE CLIENT

Oh my God, it's stunning. (*she moves back and forth looking at it from different angles*) It's so organic and colorful. (*she touches it*) Passionate and sensual. It's exquisite.

BELLA

THE CLIENT

Yes, it's lovely isn't it?

But-- (pause)

Yes?

THE CLIENT

BELLA

There's something unusual about it. I mean it seems almost feminine. The soft curves and edges. It's different from his usual style.

BELLA

Yes, he's been talking a lot about the hard and soft elements you know, and I believe he is exploring his softer more sensitive side in this work lately. *(pause)* He said something about that. Didn't he Nancy?

NANCY

Huh?

BELLA

Kolya was telling us that, don't you remember this morning when we were talking to him about the painting.

NANCY

Hmmm.

BELLA

Remember he was talking about exploring his 'feminine side'. (*jabs Nancy with her elbow*)

NANCY

Oh, uh yes. His feminine side, yes. (*a cough*) The painting certainly has that element in it. (*she stifles a chuckle and covers her mouth and turns away*) Excuse me.

THE CLIENT

(moving around back and forth and touching the painting) Its gorgeous. (turning to Bella and Nancy) When can you deliver it?

BELLA

Well he just finished it so I think we should make sure the paint has cured before we roll up the canvas. And then we will have to get the framer to stretch it—that can be done on-site though. How about one week from today?

THE CLIENT

Splendid. Please provide provenance documentation and a letter of authenticity and I will have payment ready upon delivery.

BELLA

Yes, of course. (*turns*) Nancy please make a note to call the framer and arrange for him to meet us at Mrs. Hathaway's next Friday.

NANCY

Yes m'am. (retrieves a daytimer scheduling book from her purse and makes a couple of notes)

THE CLIENT

(turns towards the door) Well I must be going now. Please give my very best regards to Kolya.

BELLA

Yes, we will. Thank you for your patience with the commission. I think it paid off.

THE CLIENT

It did. I believe this is the most beautiful painting I've ever purchased.

BELLA

I'm so glad it pleases you.

THE CLIENT

Yes it does-- very much so. Well good day then. (turns to shake hands)

BELLA

Thank you. Can we escort you back to your limo?

THE CLIENT

No thank you, I'll manage. Goodbye.

BELLA

Goodbye. Safe travels.

[DOOR CLOSES. BELLA HOLDS FINGER TO HER LIPS INDICATING SHHHH. SHE GOES TO WINDOW AND WATCHES AND WAITS WITH HER HAND UP GESTURING 'WAIT' TO NANCY. THEN SHE DROPS IT WITH A SIGH, STOMPS HER FEET AND PUMPS HER FISTS. SHE TURNS TO NANCY AND SWINGS HER AROUND AND THEY BOTH ERUPT IN LAUGHTER.]

BELLA

YES! Yes! Yes! We did it! Can you believe it?

NANCY

She loved it. And YOU did it. You're a great artist!

BELLA

(laughing) I AM. I'm a modern master! Amazing isn't it? We should get into the forging business.

NANCY

No thanks. Once is enough.

BELLA

I know. You're right. We'd be caught eventually.

[BELLA GOES TO THE REFRIDGERATOR AND RETRIEVES A BOTTLE OF BEER. SHE OPENS IT AND POURS IT INTO 2 COFFEE CUPS.]

(<i>raising her cup</i>) To ol' Mrs. Moneybags.	BELLA
To moneybags	NANCY
Salut!	BELLA
	[THEY CLINK CUPS AND DRINK A SIP.]
To art!	BELLA
To art!	NANCY
	[THEY CLINK CUPS AND DRINK IT DOWN. BELLA SMASHES HER CUP DOWN ON THE FLOOR.]

CURTAIN

Scene 9:

Later that night. Apartment is dark. A figure (Elizabeth) is sitting at the edge of the bed. Door handle turns and Kolya enters. He flips light switch up and down. Nothing. He mumbles a curse and stumbles towards the kitchen to try the lights there. Nothing. He hears a soft whimpering, sniffling.

KOLYA

Hello. Hello? Who's there? (*he moves towards the sound and stops and listens, whispers*) Elizabeth? Is that you? (*moves towards her and sits down beside her and reaches his arm around her but she pulls away*) Sweetheart, what is it? Why are you crying?

ELIZABETH

(sobs loudly) I hate you.

KOLYA

What? What's this all about? Is it the girls?

ELIZABETH

(sobbing more loudly, she turns and beats him with her fist)

KOLYA

(tries to catch her hands, she keeps beating him till he finally stops her and pulls her close) Baby baby, I'm so sorry. I promise, it won't happen again. I don't know what happened. I blacked out for three days. Dina was telling me something about some Puerto Rican girls. I said you're crazy. I didn't do that. I swear baby, I don't remember anything for the last several days.

ELIZABETH

Why did you do it?

KOLYA

I don't know. I promise. It's the wine. The booze. I don't remember the girls or anything. I think I got into a fight too. Look, can you see the bruises? It's too dark. You can't see but I woke up this morning and I felt like a train wreck and I was black and blue and covered in bruises. Some guys must've jumped me and when I didn't have anything in my wallet I guess they got mad. I don't know.

ELIZABETH

Maybe somebody knocked some sense into your head.

KOLYA

(laughs) Maybe so. I guess I had it coming. But it sure hurts.

ELIZABETH

(rubbing his head, kissing his bruises) Not as much as you hurt me.

KOLYA

I'm so sorry baby. Please please forgive me.

ELIZABETH

Do you still love me?

KOLYA

Baby, (*softly*) baby, Of course I do. (*he pulls her close and they kiss*) Always. Forever. You're everything to me. I'd never do anything to hurt you I promise. I'm going to stop drinking. I am. I'm going to get some help. I'm done with the wreckage. It's over. I swear. (*pause*) I want us to go back to the way it was. I love you! Only you!

ELIZABETH

(*buries her head in his arms*) I thought you didn't. I saw you with those girls and you wouldn't answer the phone. I was so angry with you. I wanted to kill you.

KOLYA

I know. (pause) Please don't kill me.

ELIZABETH

(chuckling) I wanted to. If I see you with those tarts again, I will.

KOLYA

Never again. I'm all yours baby. My heart is in my hands. I'm giving it to you.

ELIZABETH

Oh, I love you Kolya.

KOLYA

I love you too.

[THEY SIT EMBRACED FOR SEVERAL MOMENTS HUGGING AND KISSING]

KOLYA

Sweetheart?

ELIZABETH

KOLYA

Yes?

Will you marry me?

ELIZABETH

KOLYA

(crying, smothers him in kisses, jumps on him and knocks him down on the bed, straddling him)

So it's yes?

ELIZABETH

Silly, you're so silly.

KOLYA

You make me so happy. We'll have a beautiful life together. I promise. I'll sober up. I'll take care of you.

ELIZABETH

And I'll take care of you. You can paint and stay home. It'll be ok. I'll support us. We'll make it work.

KOLYA

I'll do my part too.

(chuckling) I know.

No, don't laugh, I mean it.

Of course you will sweetheart.

You don't believe me.

ELIZABETH

I do but I'm just saying one of us has to hold down a steady job. I don't mind.

KOLYA

ELIZABETH

ELIZABETH

KOLYA

KOLYA

I have a job.

ELIZABETH

(surprise) You do?

KOLYA

Yes, you didn't hear the news?

No

KOLYA

ELIZABETH

The painting. The commission. I finished it.

ELIZABETH

You did? That's wonderful. Where is it?

KOLYA

Here. It's here stretched out on the wall. Wait, let me get a candle so you can see it. (*he fumbles around in the kitchen and finds a candle and lights it and holds it up for her to see the painting*)

ELIZABETH

(gasps) Oh Kolya, you did it. You did it! It's beautiful. (she comes over to him and puts her arms around him and gives him a kiss). I'm so proud of you.

KOLYA

Yeah, I don't know how. But there it is. And with you by my side, I can do anything.

ELIZABETH

Make love to me.

[KOLYA PICKS HER UP IN HIS ARMS AND TAKES HER TO THE BED, BLOWS OUT THE CANDLE AND THEY GET IN BED. A MOMENT PASSES AND THE PHONE RINGS.]

BELLA

KOLYA dear! I'm sorry we missed you. The client came and saw the painting. She fell in love

with it. She said it's the most beautiful painting in her collection. And that's not all. I just got off the phone with her. She called a few minutes ago and she wants to commission another painting. Same size. But she wants it done in your earlier style, the more masculine style you know. I told her I'd have to talk to you. She said money is not an issue. She's offering to pay \$50,000 for it. \$50,000. I've never sold a painting for that much. Im so proud of you. You did it Kolya. You have arrived. Ok, call me. Bye!

CURTAIN

FINIS