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# *Appearances to the Contrary*

by

**Jim Inman**

Grand Prize Winner of the National Repertory Theatre International Playwrights Competition

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# Appearances to the Contrary

by Jim Inman

## **The CHARACTERS** (in order of appearance)

TIMOTHY; *an Entertainment Attorney; age 45/50.*

TOM; *a respected actor around 26 who has written a play. He has an out of control drinking problem.*

MURIEL; *Timothy's best friend. A top Literary Agent around 45-50 years of age.*

BARBARA; *a Television Production Assistant and friend of Muriel's. She is about 25.*

## **THE SETTING**

*Time: A Mid-September evening. The Fall of 1975.*

*Place: The Living Room/Foyer of an attractive Apartment on the East Side of NYC*

# Appearances to the Contrary

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## A FULL-LENGTH PLAY IN ONE ACT

*(SETTING: The living room of an attractive apartment on the East Side of New York City; a balmy mid-September evening. The decor is tasteful and expensive, and the taste is that of the inhabitants rather than the inhabitants' decorator. The front entrance leads into the foyer which opens onto the living room. The other essentials of the set are the door leading to the den, off which is a bedroom, and another leading to the kitchen. In front of a sofa is a coffee table with a chair on either side facing the table. There are, of course, other pieces of furniture; end tables, bookshelves, and at least one other chair. There is also a bar and a desk, on which is prominently displayed in a beautiful silver frame a photograph of an adorable five-year-old boy.)*

*(AT RISE: An empty stage. The den door is ajar and TIMOTHY can be heard talking on a telephone.)*

TIMOTHY (O.S.)

I know it's making you crazy. I don't like it either, but that's how it is. We get to wait...

*(The FRONT DOORBELL RINGS long and loud. TIMOTHY, talking on a phone with a long extension cord, enters from the den. He is a man of about forty-five/fifty. Attractive; trim; athletic; craggy. He is a man who is successful and very much in control. He heads towards the front door.)*

TIMPOTHY

*(Reaching the door)* Hold on, a minute. Someone at the door...

*(He opens it. In the doorway is a boyish energized man of about twenty-six. He is not really handsome, but has a good face – warm, open, expressive. He is carrying a large plastic grocery bag.)*

TOM

*(Softly and urgently)* Is she here yet?

TIMOTHY

No.

TOM

*(Entering)* She's late! What time is it?

TIMOTHY

*(Looking at his watch)* 7:35. And she's not late

TOM

It was 7:35 in the lobby.

TIMOTHY

7:40? *(Back to phone conversation)* I'm back. It's Tom Brouder having a little anxiety attack...

*(TOM has become distracted by a recent set of composite pictures of himself that he's spotted on the coffee table. As he grabs for them, he knocks over the photograph of the little boy, shudders as if he's just spilled a container of holy water, and quickly sets it upright again, patting the frame perfunctorily.)*

TOM

Ooops! Sorry, Timmy.

*(He drops the grocery bag on a nearby chair and begins to peruse his pictures.)*

TIMOTHY

*(Into phone)* What...? No! They're not looking for somebody else. They're looking for money!

TOM

*(Regarding the composite)* Man, these are great! These head shots are really great, huh! I'm almost handsome!

TIMOTHY

To say the least. *(Into phone)* I know you don't like it, but live with it.

TOM

Don't you like them?

TIMOTHY

I do. *(Into phone)* When they have the money, you've got the deal. Okay...?

TOM

Yeah. Really great.

TIMOTHY

*(Into phone)* Okay. We'll talk on Monday. Have a good weekend. And relax. *(To TOM)* That goes for you, too.

TOM

You think Madge'll like them, too?

TIMOTHY

Doesn't she like everything about you?

TOM

*(Big smile)* Yeah. I forgot.

TIMOTHY

Now that that's settled, how about putting that ice in an ice bucket. Oh, and thanks for picking it up.

TOM

*(Snapping to)* Yeah, sure...

*(He drops the composites, grabs up the grocery bag and heads for the kitchen.)*

TOM, *Continued*

This is a helluva time for your ice maker to conk out, huh?

TIMOTHY

*(Heading toward the den)* Well, it's not exactly tragic, but...

TOM

*(As he exits into the kitchen)* Except that tonight is kinda special, Timothy.

TIMOTHY

Right...

*(He disappears into the den with the telephone.)*

TOM

*(Sticking his head out of the kitchen)* Oh, I picked up a bottle of brandy, too. For Muriel.

TIMOTHY

She'll appreciate it...

TOM

You don't have to tell her. I just wanted to.

*(He disappears into the kitchen, again.)*

TIMOTHY

*(Smiling)* You're a prince.

*(TIMOTHY begins to prepare the bar—putting out glasses, napkins, etc. DOORMAN BUZZER. TOM is heard handling the ice with frantic urgency.)*

TOM *(O.S.)*

Help! She's early!

TIMOTHY

I guess she's nervous, too.

TOM (*O.S.*)

What time is it!

TIMOTHY

7:35. What are you drinking?

TOM

(*Appearing with an ice bucket and heading for a wall mirror*) Scotch. And a little water. Aren't you going to answer the door?

TIMOTHY

She's in the lobby. You got a couple of minutes. I thought you were 86ing the scotch for tonight. How about a Coke?

TOM

A little scotch first. Okay? I'm a wreck...

TIMOTHY

One then. But short. And light.

TOM

(*Studying himself in the mirror*) Good thinking. Do I look all right?

TIMOTHY

For a playwright. (*As he digs into the ice bucket*) Tom. You forgot the ice.

TOM

(*Distracted*) Huh...

TIMOTHY

You managed to put seven cubes in here...

TOM

I did? God, I'm sorry. I'll get some more in a minute, okay. Soon's I pull myself together...

TIMOTHY

(*Amused by Tom's preoccupation*) Fair enough.

TOM

What if she doesn't like it, Tim?

TIMOTHY

Would I have invited her here if I didn't think she'd like it?

TOM

She's your best friend.

TIMOTHY

Which is all the more reason I wouldn't have invited her. Your play's good, Tom.

TOM

She's gonna love it, huh?

TIMOTHY

Like it.

TOM

Enough to handle it?

TIMOTHY

Possibly.

TOM

Jesus! Do you know what that could do for me?! I mean, Timothy, the lady's a giant!

TIMOTHY

She's pretty good.

TOM

Yeah. And if she likes it, if she takes it on, if she gets it produced... I could become another Mamet, or Pinter, or Shaw...

TIMOTHY

*(Dryly)* Or Donagan.

TOM

Yeah! Yeah!! And if Muriel could put him on top, think what she could do for me!

TIMOTHY

The thought overwhelms. *(Handing TOM his drink)* Here you are.

TOM

Oh... Thanks. *(Toasting)* Cheers.

TIMOTHY

Cheers.

TOM

*(Sipping it)* You forgot the scotch.

TIMOTHY

You wanted it light.

TOM

*(Laughing)* You over-reacted!

*(The DOORBELL RINGS. TOM stiffens.)*

TOM

Oh, God...!

*(He takes a long drink.)*

TIMOTHY

*(As he goes to the door)* Would you try not to...uh...'kill' that before I get back?

*(Enroute to the front door, TIMOTHY moves Timmy's picture from the coffee table to a desk Stage Left. TOM checks to be sure TIMOTHY is not looking, then 'kills' his drink, and goes back to the mirror for a last minute check. Then he looks to see that his fly is up and 'locked.' It is. He is ready. TIMOTHY opens the door to MURIEL; striking, handsome and smartly dressed. She is a contemporary of TIM'S.)*

MURIEL

Before you say another word, get me a drink! I'm famished!

TIMOTHY

*(For TOM's benefit)* You're early.

MURIEL

Really? I thought I was late? *(They kiss perfunctorily as friends do at such times, and MURIEL continues on into the living room.)* You wouldn't believe the day I've had!  
*(Spots TOM; opens her arms to him)* Tom!

*(TOM turns. He is suddenly very together as he strides to her, the young leading man)*

TOM

Hello, Muriel. How are you?

MURIEL

*(Leaning forward to let him kiss a cheek)* Good! How are you?

*(TOM takes both her hands firmly, he kisses a cheek. He does so with ease and style and assurance. MURIEL is not quite ready for it)*

MURIEL, *Continued*

My, my! Don't answer! I can tell! *(Pushing away from him slightly and looking him up and down; 'sexily')* Where have you been all my life, Tiger?

*(MURIEL eases away from TOM with aplomb; TOM continuing to hold both hands tightly which causes her pain.)*

MURIEL, *Continued*

Uh...Tom...the ring.!

*(TOM releases her hands. She shakes out the 'offended' finger.)*

MURIEL, *Continued*

*(To TIMOTHY)* Where's my drink?

TIMOTHY

Coming up.

MURIEL

Brandy-on-the-rocks with a splash.

TIMOTHY

I remembered.

MURIEL

*(To TOM)* Can't wait to talk to you, Tom!

TOM

Oh...uh...thank you...

MURIEL

By the way. Ol' Ed was asleep on the job, again.

TIMOTHY

*(Laughing)* Did you wake him up?

MURIEL

After I rang myself in!

TOM

He let me in...? Just 10 minutes ago...?

MURIEL

Darling. Ten minutes can be a lifetime for a very tired old gentleman. Did my service call...?

TIMOTHY

Were you expecting them to...?

MURIEL

No. I'm taking a survey.

TIMOTHY

I deserved that.

MURIEL

Never mind. They will. (*Crossing in front of TOM*) Excuse me, Tom. I just have to sit down.

(*As MURIEL moves toward the sofa, she flings her bag casually and gracefully into a corner of it, and sits directly in the center, as if to hold court. Then she begins to remove her shoes.*)

MURIEL, *Continued*

You wouldn't believe some of the people I've had to deal with today! I couldn't have had more difficulty penetrating thick heads if I had been alone on Easter Island!

(*The men laugh.*)

TIMOTHY

That bad, huh?

MURIEL

Worse! Do you know with what I was greeted at ten o'clock this morning? A phone call from Matthew.

TIMOTHY

(*Glancing at TOM*) Donagan?

MURIEL

(*Sing-songy*) That's right! (*More naturally*) Now, this boy is thirty-five years old. He has had three hits! in the last two years – thank God! – and this morning, with the sun shining gloriously, he is depressed! I think his problem is he wants to be significant.

TOM

(*Wanting to make an impression*) Well, I think he is significant.

MURIEL

His plays are about as significant as an American flag, made in Japan, and stuck on a paper moon.

TIMOTHY

(*Dryly*) You've used that one.

MURIEL

I know. But I've changed the rhythm. It scans better, don't you think?

TIMOTHY

Perhaps. But the cruelty's still there.

MURIEL

So's the truth. Do you know where I was at eleven?

TIMOTHY

Back in bed.

MURIEL

Timothy, your humor is devastating. *(To TOM)* I am in my office every morning at 8:30 and he knows it. *(To TIMOTHY)* Case closed. *(Spotting TOM's proofs on the table)* What are these?

TOM

*(Enthusiastically)* Oh...!...I just had some pictures made!

TIMOTHY

*(As TOM is speaking)* Tom's contacts.

MURIEL

*(Shuffling through them perfunctorily)* Hummm. They're good. Very good.

TOM

You like them...??

MURIEL

*(Perfunctorily)* Love them! *(Drops them indifferently on the table; sighs)* Oh, God, it's good to be here. Where's Madge?

TIMOTHY

How the hell did you get to that?

MURIEL

I'm devious. Where is she?

TIMOTHY

I told you on the phone. Bermuda.

MURIEL

What in God's name is she doing in Bermuda this time of year?

TIMOTHY

Visiting.

MURIEL

Who?

TIMOTHY

The Parkers.

The who's? MURIEL

Friends. TIMOTHY

No bridge? MURIEL

Of course bridge. TIMOTHY

Tournament? MURIEL

What else? TIMOTHY

When did she go? MURIEL

Yesterday. TIMOTHY

For...? MURIEL

A week. TIMOTHY

Poor baby. *(To TOM)* He's a widower when it comes to bridge, you know. MURIEL

Not exactly. She does come back. TIMOTHY

That's true. *(Beat)* Somehow this conversation's not getting off the ground. Shall we talk about something else? MURIEL

Well, we could talk about Tom's play... TIMOTHY

Oh, I know that, and I want to, but could I have something to nibble on, first? You don't mind, do you, Tom? MURIEL

TOM

*(Flustered)* ...no...?

TIMOTHY

I was wondering when you were going to ask that.

MURIEL

Now, why would you wonder when I was going to ask that?

TIMOTHY

*(Interrupting)* Because you crashed in here saying, "Get me a drink. I'm famished." Which is to say, "Get me some food just as fast as you can!"

MURIEL

You know I'm on a diet!

TIMOTHY

Which is to say, "Get me some food just as fast as you can!"

MURIEL

*(Chuckling)* Oh, you shit! *(To TOM)* He really is, Tom. He really is a shit. I don't know why you've let him handle you all these years. Professionally, that is! *(She appreciates her innuendo. But only for a moment. Suddenly)* That was beneath me. Strike it. *(She holds up her empty glass)* And while you're up... *(No one is up)* ...get me another one, will you? *(But before anyone can respond)* No! Don't! And I am on a diet! And I have lost three pounds! And I will go back on it tomorrow! And will you please get me some food!

*(The following two speeches are simultaneous.)*

TIMOTHY

You are famished!

MURIEL

I am famished!

*(TIMOTHY laughs and goes into the kitchen)*

MURIEL

*(After an uncomfortable silence)* So, Tom, how have you been?

TOM

Just fine.

MURIEL

Good.

*(Another awkward pause, and then MURIEL notices her glass is empty.)*

MURIEL, *Continued*

Am I wrong, or is there nothing in this glass?

TOM

Not anymore.

MURIEL

Heaven! *(Calling to TIMOTHY as she starts to the bar)* Timothy! Can I fix myself another drink?

TIMOTHY *(O.S.)*

No!

MURIEL

*(To TOM)* Isn't he sweet? So direct! *(Yelling at TIMOTHY)* Thank you, darling!

*(MURIEL proceeds to the bar. TOM notices that his glass is empty, too, and he follows her)*

TOM

*(Out of desperation to get to the purpose of the evening)* Say! Read any good plays lately?

*(He laughs, but it is an uncomfortable one. It is almost as if MURIEL has not heard him. She is preoccupied; her concentration given entirely to glancing at her watch.)*

MURIEL

Thomas, I haven't read a good play for so long I wonder why I'm in the business. *(Hoping her watch is fast)* It's getting late. *(Suddenly realizing what she has said)* Oh, my God! Pay no attention to that! I didn't mean a word of it! Excuse me, do you have the time?

TOM

*(Hurt)* No.

MURIEL

Damn. *(Noticing that TOM'S glass is empty and reaching for it)* What are you drinking?

TOM

*(Pouting)* I'll fix my own. Thank you.

MURIEL

Ahhh! An independent man! I adore independent men. *(Discovering there is no ice)* Don't you love it? An ice bucket and no ice. Didn't he know he was having company? *(Takes the bucket and starts for the kitchen, yelling as she goes)* What are you stirring up out there, Timothy?

*(TOM very quietly fills his glass with scotch. He walks back to his chair and sits. Then he looks at the sofa, gets up, moves to it, and sits exactly in the center—where MURIEL has been sitting; her shoes resting under the coffee table. He kicks them to one side as MURIEL and TIMOTHY enter. She is carrying the ice bucket and goes to the bar to fix her drink. Her mouth is gorged with food. TIMOTHY is carrying a tray of hor d'oeuvres. He puts them on the coffee table.)*

MURIEL

*(As they enter)* Ooohhh, this is soooo good! The only thing I abhor about my diet is that I can't eat! *(At the bar)* Are we going out for dinner later, boys?

TIMOTHY

I have to wait around here, but maybe Tom could.

TOM

*(Eagerly)* Well, yeah, I guess so...

MURIEL

*(To Timothy)* We'll do it some other time, then. Is that all right, Tom?

TOM

*(Disappointed)* Oh, yeah... Sure...

MURIEL

*(Somewhat addled)* By the way! I asked Bob to meet me here.

TIMOTHY

Bob...?

MURIEL

I'd hoped we could have dinner together. I want you to know each other.

TIMOTHY

Hummm. Sounds serious.

MURIEL

*(With distraction)* ...yes...

*(Then, suddenly, she throws down another hor d'oeuvres and checks her watch, again. She has become angry; frustrated.)*

MURIEL, *Continued*

That goddamned service! This is ridiculous! May I use your phone? I should have heard from those bastards by now. May I use your phone?

TIMOTHY

Of course.

MURIEL

Where is it?

TIMOTHY

In the den. Where is was the last time you were here.

MURIEL

The last time I was here, there was no such thing as a phone.

TIMOTHY

Funny.

MURIEL

*(Charging toward the den)* If I'm alone again tonight because of that fucking service!

*(She exits. TIMOTHY looks at TOM.)*

TOM

Looks like her guy's going to stand her up. Wouldn't that be too bad.

TIMOTHY

She hurt your feelings?

TOM

Sure she did. Just because she's a big shot she doesn't have to treat people like they're not even on the planet. God, I'd love to have had dinner with her. Maybe then she'd talk about the play.

TIMOTHY

So you're upset because she wants to talk about things other than that.

TOM

Well, that's what she's here for, Tim! What the fuck's all that crap about dates and clients and food and booze! She's a pretty boring lady!

TIMOTHY

Okay, okay, okay. She may be boring, but she is also important...

TOM

You'd never know it!

TIMOTHY

...annnd if you want her to show any interest, at all, in your script, you'd better just calm down and deal with her in her own way.

TOM

*(Exploding)* Her way! Do you know what she said to me while you were in the kitchen!

TIMOTHY

No. What did she say?

TOM

I asked her is she'd read any good...! Ah, forget it!

TIMOTHY

All right.

*(Pause; Tom withers.)*

TOM

*(Quietly; almost as a plea)* Oh, God, Timothy. I don't want to blow this!

TIMOTHY

I know you don't.

TOM

I'm an actor; but I can write! I didn't know I could write, but I can; I don't know where it came from, but it did. And I loved doing it. It made me feel like... Well, like... It made me feel good. That's it. Just good. About myself. It's like the only thing I've ever done that...that really made sense, you know? And I don't know why.

TIMOTHY

I think you may be talking about passion here.

TOM

Yeah. Passion. *(Beat; a bemused laugh)* And I always thought passion was just about sex!

TIMOTHY

*(Amused)* Not necessarily...

MURIEL *(O.S.)*

*(Bellowing from the bedroom)* Hey! What's your address?

TIMOTHY

405 E. 54th.

MURIEL *(O.S.)*

Shit, yes! I knew that!

TOM

*(Laughing; he is much more relaxed now)* Lovely lady! Genteel!

TIMOTHY

Well, she is a little...off kilter...tonight...

TOM

Tell me!

MURIEL (O.S.)

*(From the den) AAAAaaaaggggg!!! That service woman drives me nuts!!! (Enters) Can you believe it? The message was left 30 minutes ago and they forgot to relay it? Christ! If we ever get together it'll be a fuckin' miracle!!! (Stops, having become aware of her behavior, and suddenly becoming quite the lady) I'm sorry... It occurs to me I have abandoned my ...'cool'...*

TIMOTHY

*(Laughing)* Forget it. You got the message.

MURIEL

Oh, yes. Everything's fine...

TIMOTHY

Good. Then he'll pick you up here?

MURIEL

Huh...? Oh. Oh, yes... Yes. Shortly... *(Flustered; momentarily disoriented)* When did Madge go to Bermuda?

TIMOTHY

*(Shaking his head as if he hasn't heard her correctly)* Where's your head tonight?

MURIEL

What...?

TIMOTHY

Do you know how many times I've told you not only that she was going, but when she was going? The last time being five minutes ago?

MURIEL

Now, don't bore me with numbers. Just tell me when she went.

TIMOTHY

Yesterday.

MURIEL

Oh. *(Long pause)* Timothy...? *(Beat)* Speaking of Madge...

TIMOTHY

*(To TOM)* Ohoh! Here we go!

MURIEL

Here we go what?...where...?

TIMOTHY

You're going to ask me a question.

MURIEL

Well...yes...I was...

TIMOTHY

Hold your ears, Tom. Muriel is going to ask me if Madge is frigid.

TOM

Huh...?

MURIEL

What?! Have you lost your mind!

TIMOTHY

Weren't you?

MURIEL

I can't imagine why you'd ever think such a thing!

TIMOTHY

It's a litany. Every time we're together that is always your first question after you've asked for food and booze.

MURIEL

That is not so.

TIMOTHY

In one way or another, it is.

MURIEL

Every other time, maybe. But not this time. I'd never bring that up in front of Tom.

TIMOTHY

Oh? What were you going to ask, then?

MURIEL

*(Sputtering)* Well, I...uh...I...

TIMOTHY

What?

MURIEL

*(Smiling wickedly)* On the other hand, since you've brought it up... *(To TOM)* He does have that perpetual hungry look, Tom. Now what does that say to you?

TIMOTHY

What does it say to you, Muriel?

MURIEL

I've told you. It says you're not quite satisfied.

TIMOTHY

Really?

MURIEL

Um hum. Anything I can do to help?

TIMOTHY

*(Laughing)* Ha! If Claude could hear you now!

MURIEL

That was cruel.

TIMOTHY

Why?

MURIEL

You're getting even. For Madge.

TIMOTHY

You're pathological! What are you talking about?

MURIEL

I was not the frigid lady he said I was.

TIMOTHY

I didn't know he'd said that.

MURIEL

And let's face it, darling. A sex symbol Claude was not!

TIMOTHY

Wasn't he?

MURIEL

Did he ever turn you on?

TIMOTHY

No.

MURIEL

Well...? *(Thinks that was delicious; suddenly)* Fuck him! *(An afterthought)* God rest his soul...but fuck him!

TOM

Pardon me, but...I'm getting a little lost...?

MURIEL

Oh! I'm sorry, darling. We've known each other so long we talk in tongues. Claude belonged to me once. *(Beat)* An eon ago. *(Beat; a gentle memory; a warm, unguarded smile)* And we were almost happy, too...for a moment. *(A sudden change)* Fuck him!

*(TIMOTHY laughs, but TOM is becoming uncomfortable. There is an awkward pause.)*

TOM

Well! Uh...if you two will excuse me, I'll leave you to old times...

MURIEL

Where're you going?

TOM

I have a need to...uh...ponder a play.

MURIEL

You mean you gotta pee! *(She likes that one, but TOM exits without responding.)* Do you think he was trying to tell me something *(TIMOTHY only looks at her.)* Why are you looking at me like that?

TIMOTHY

I'm not sure. Are you all right?

*(Strangely touched. Few people have ever asked her that and really wanted to know.)*

MURIEL

Humh? *(Beat; a recovery)* Oh course! What made you ask?

TIMOTHY

I don't know. You seem more...discombobulated...than usual.

MURIEL

Discombobulated!? Heaven! Is that possible?

TIMOTHY

Definitely.

MURIEL

Well, I'm fine. Thank you. But are you all right?

TIMOTHY

Of course.

How about Tom? MURIEL

Oh, he's a little anxious, but... TIMOTHY

*(Interrupting)* I don't mean that. MURIEL

No? TIMOTHY

*(MURIEL checks the den with a glance to be certain that TOM won't hear; she lowers her voice.)*

Timothy. Until him...you handled only name performers, isn't that right? MURIEL

Yes. TIMOTHY

Why did you take him on? MURIEL

You know why, Muriel! His father asked me to. TIMOTHY

Boola, boola! MURIEL

Wrong. Harvard. TIMOTHY

Sorry. MURIEL

And fortunately, he's good. TIMOTHY

*(With a wicked glint in her eyes)* Hummm... —looking! Or in bed! MURIEL

You know? You are basically a terribly sick person. TIMOTHY

MURIEL

I know. But colorful. And you're right. He is good... *(Beat)* ...but what's wrong with him tonight? He seems so ...touchy. What's the matter with him? He is usually so warm and charming and...

TIMOTHY

*(Not unkindly)* And willing to listen to you, Muriel, go on and on in your own inimitable way. Had you been drinking before you came here?

MURIEL

Just a brandy or two at the office while I... Well, you didn't want me 'til 8:00 and I had some things I could deal with there, so... *(Defensively)* After all, it was cocktail time. That's hardly worth an indictment...

TIMOTHY

It wasn't intended as an indictment.

MURIEL

And I told you what a ghastly day I've had...

TIMOTHY

Alllllright, Muriel. You're had a rough day. But so has Tom. He's just finished his first play. He's excited. He's antsy and edgy and eager to hear what you have to say.

MURIEL

Ahhh! Power! I adore it! *(More naturally)* Very well, darling. As soon as he comes back. All right?

TIMOTHY

You just made yourself a deal.

*(There is an uncomfortable pause. MURIEL reaches for an hors d'oeuvre and puts it in her mouth.)*

MURIEL

*(With a strange, garbled urgency)* I still wish you'd tell me the truth about you two. *(TOM returning; MURIEL blurts out)* Tom! I read your play!

*(It is too loud and too eager. And it comes so out of left field that TOM stops in his tracks, nonplused.)*

TOM

*(Finally)* Oh...good.

MURIEL

Shall we talk about it in front of Timothy?

*(TOM is suddenly terribly nervous. Now that the moment of truth is here, he becomes almost boyish. But it is not an act. Despite his occasional bravura, he is basically very insecure, especially where his art is concerned, and his boyish reaction is quite real.)*

TOM

Well, sure...if he can stand to hear it talked about anymore.

TIMOTHY

*(Smiling)* I can stand it.

TOM

*(Pause; to MURIEL)* Go!

*(TOM takes a long, quick drink, and during MURIEL's next few speeches, goes at it as if it were ice water on a summer day. MURIEL assumes her professional demeanor. And it is not just attitude. It is, rather, a reflex having to do with her position, and she can do it better than anyone. She leans back casually against the chair, crosses her legs at the knee, drapes an arm over the back of the chair so that it hangs gracefully, and in those few moments, even without shoes, becomes the literary agent nonpareil.)*

MURIEL

I must tell you, Tom, I am terribly impressed with your ability.

TOM

*(Pleased; quietly)* Thank you.

MURIEL

I had no idea you had this talent...lurking...inside you.

TOM

Thank you.

MURIEL

Timothy tells me this is your first play. What else have you written?

TOM

Nothing.

MURIEL

Nothing?

TOM

Nothing.

MURIEL

*(Awed)* At all?

TOM

*(Very pleased; with a little laugh)* At all.

MURIEL

Well, you didn't tell me that, Tim!

TIMOTHY

*(With a 'smug' shrug)* What can I say?

MURIEL

*(Laughing)* Oh, bug off! *(To TOM)* Really? The first thing you have ever written?

TOM

Other than letters.

MURIEL

Why, that's remarkable! Have you wanted to write all these years?

TOM

No.

MURIEL

*(To TIMOTHY)* He's kidding!

TIMOTHY

No.

TOM

No. I never wanted to. It never entered my mind. I thought I only wanted to act.

MURIEL

Then...how did this happen?

TOM

Oh, I don't know. It just came to me, I guess.

MURIEL

My God! Brushed by the Muses!

TOM

*(An ingenuous little laugh)* Sort of.

MURIEL

That's marvelous!

TOM

Thank you.

MURIEL

You're more than welcome. How do you want it?

TOM

Pardon me...?

MURIEL

My criticism. You don't impress me as the kind of man who needs the 'kid glove' treatment. You want it straight?

TOM

Sure... *(Beat)* Straight...

MURIEL

All right. *(Beat)* I don't think your play's solid yet, but I do think it can be pulled together.

TOM

*(Deflating rapidly)* Pulled together...?

MURIEL

*(Kindly)* Tom. I only want to be helpful. Hear me out. All right?

TOM

All right.

MURIEL

Fine. Your writing is quite good. Your play is quite bad.

TOM

Huh...?

MURIEL

First, keep in mind that virtually no scripts – none – have come hot off the typewriter and gone right into production.

TOM

None.

MURIEL

None.

TOM

That's nice to know.

TIMOTHY

Tom.

MURIEL

No. It's all right, Tim. *(To TOM)* Tom. I would like you to try to think of your script – and it is only a first script – as a...

TOM

A 'first script' is automatically considered to be less good than, say, tenth scripts by less talented people...?

MURIEL

*(With healthy respect, not a put-down; to TIMOTHY)* My God! The creative ego! *(To TOM)* Tom. No 'kid gloves.' Remember?

TOM

Right! And I meant that, but... *(Smiles sheepishly)* ...I hadn't expected you to be...quite...so direct... so... well...don't use the gloves; just sort of...keep them handy. Okay?

MURIEL

*(Laughing)* Fair enough. *(Picking right up where she left off)* ...and on top of its being a first, I understand that you wrote it in eight days. Now, you have to admit, that's some kind of record.

TOM

Nor really. The world was made in seven.

MURIEL

Exactly. And just look at it.

TOM

*(Beat)* Right. Go on.

MURIEL

*(Suddenly noting that her glass is empty, again)* I don't believe it! *(To TIMOTHY)* May I have another, please, Tim? No! Stop! Never mind. I'll get it myself. More activity! That's what I need! More activity! Keeps the blood running! *(Goes to the bar and pours herself another brandy)* Now! Let's go to the bottom line. Do you know the biggest problem with your play?

TOM

No.

MURIEL

The plot. I couldn't follow it.

TOM

You couldn't...?

MURIEL

No. I never knew who was doing what to whom. One reason is the names you've chosen for your characters. Now, listen to this. Billy-Nancy-Pattie-Eddie. Eddie-Billy-Pattie-Nancy. Da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da. Da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da. You see what I mean?

TOM

Well, at least, you know their names...

MURIEL

But they confuse me. I'm never quite sure which name belongs to whom. Now, 'Eddie.' It's about him. Right? He's the kid who wants to go into show business.

TOM

You're batting a thousand.

MURIEL

And by the way, that's a marvelous scene when he makes his debut in the converted burlesque house. Wildly funny.

TOM

*(Brightening)* Thank you. It really sort of happened that way, too. I mean, in real... [life]

MURIEL

*(Dismissing him; deflating him once again)* Fine. So that leaves...'Billie'...as his best friend.

TOM

That's right.

MURIEL

And his tap-dancing teacher is...which?

TOM

Nancy.

MURIEL

'Nancy.' Which leaves...'Pattie'...?

TOM

...as his girlfriend.

*(By now, MURIEL is concentrating on her drink and, for the moment, seems to have checked out, only nodding at each new fact that TOM presents.)*

TOM, *Continued*

Since they were five. *(Pause)* For twelve years. *(Pause)* They're all seventeen...

MURIEL  
Yes. I got that.

TOM  
...except Nancy.

MURIEL  
Who...?

TOM  
...the dancing teacher. She's thirty-seven.

MURIEL  
Yes. I got that.

TOM  
They're all plot points. I just want you to know where you are as we go along.

TIMOTHY  
(*To MURIEL*) Didn't I tell you he'd be a joy to work with?

MURIEL  
(*Laughing*) Don't worry. I can handle him.

TIMOTHY  
I'm a little afraid of that.

TOM  
Huh...?

MURIEL  
(*Playfully*) Timothy. Don't you have something else to do...?

TIMOTHY  
(*Emphatically*) No.

MURIEL  
Now that's communicating. Where were we?

TOM  
You were trying to figure out who was doing what to whom.

MURIEL  
Yes. All right! So who is? Who's sleeping with whom?

TOM

What...? (*Beat*) OOOooohhhh! Who's sleeping with whom? (*Starts to laugh*) I thought you meant, 'who's doing what to whom'...emotionally...or something. Well, you see, it's not really about who's sleeping with whom.

MURIEL

(*Interrupting; laughing*) Oh, I know that! But it is important. So let's deal with it. Trust me...?

TOM

Sure.

MURIEL

Good. Now. Who, for instance, made it with...what's her name. The young one?

TOM

Pattie. Well...Eddie didn't. Billy did.

MURIEL

Now, Eddie is her boyfriend of twelve years, and he didn't. Right? But his best friend did. (*Amused, but not intending to be cruel*) Hummm. That's a relationship!

TOM

(*Not liking this at all*) But it wasn't clear to you?

MURIEL

It was about Billy. But not about Eddie.

TOM

Why wasn't it?

MURIEL

Because Billy just comes right out and says it! Eddie never does!

TOM

Says what?

MURIEL

Says he made it with her.

TOM

But Eddie didn't!

MURIEL

Then Eddie should say he didn't.

TOM

But he's more subtle. He implies...

MURIEL

And that's exactly my point, Tom. You're too subtle here. You imply too much. Here, you should simply have Eddie say, "I never made it with her!"

TOM

*(A simple statement)* Just say it.

MURIEL

Yes.

TOM

Make it clear.

MURIEL

Exactly.

TOM

Then maybe I should have him say, "I never had intercourse with her!", in case somebody doesn't know what 'it' is.

MURIEL

*(Laughing)* No, no, no, no, you don't have to go that far! But you see how I get lost?

TOM

*(An under-the-breath mumble)* I'm beginning to.

MURIEL

Pardon me?

TOM

Nothing. Go on!

MURIEL

By the way! Why didn't Eddie make it with her?

TOM

It's in the script, Muriel! Pattie is terrified of sex, and Eddie loves her too much to...force...himself on her...

MURIEL

Are you sure Eddie's not the one who's terrified of sex?

TOM

Of course, he is! What seventeen-year-old kid isn't?

MURIEL

*(Simply)* Billy.

TOM

...oh...

MURIEL

Which reminds me. Does Eddie have a little sneaker for him?

TOM

*(In total disbelief)* What!?!

MURIEL

A sneaker! A sneaker! You know what I mean, Thomas Brouder. The scene in the dressing room after he has made an ass of himself on stage, and Pattie and Billy come backstage and Eddie grabs her and buries his head in her neck, trying to hold himself together. Why...why in the midst of holding her, does he reach out with one hand for Billy? And why does Billy take it so readily and...and hold...onto it? Now, what does that mean? What's going on there?

TOM

*(Stunned)* I don't believe the words that come out of your mouth! Right down the line I say—I have slept with this one, I have not slept with that one, I have...

MURIEL

*(Interrupting)* Oh! Then Eddie is you?

TOM

*(Flustered)* Of course!

MURIEL

Naturally. Playwrights always write about themselves in their first plays.

TOM

May I go on?

MURIEL

Certainly.

TOM

I said, I have slept with this one, I have not slept with that one, I have slept with this one, I have not slept with that one—it's on the page in black and white and you miss it! You miss it all! And at the same time, you pick one scene, when, in a moment of tremendous need, he reaches out for his best friend while he is holding his girl, and you want to know if he's got a 'sneaker' for him?!? Do you think the guy's a fag, or something! Do you think this play's about a closet queen!!!

MURIEL

I never said anything about a... *(The APARTMENT DOORBELL rings)* Thank God! Saved by the bell! *(TIMOTHY has started to get up; MURIEL stops him.)* I'll get it, Timothy!

TOM

*(Flopping back in his chair as she goes to the door)* Jesus! She's too much...!

*(MURIEL is at the door. She opens it. In the hallway is an extremely attractive girl of about twenty-five. She is wearing a stylish, 'trendy' and very appealing outfit. Despite his frustration and anger with MURIEL, TOM is immediately drawn to this girl.)*

BARBARA

Hi!

MURIEL

Come in, darling!

*(There is an awkward moment as MURIEL sidesteps an intended embrace that is initiated by BARBARA. Then she closes the door.)*

BARBARA

*(Only momentarily nonplused; lowers her voice)* The doorman let me in. He said I didn't appear to be dangerous. Was it all right to come on up?

MURIEL

Of course, it was. And your timing's perfect. We're having the most stimulating discussion! Tom! Tim! I'd like you to meet Bob!

*(TIMOTHY and TOM speak simultaneously.)*

TOM  
Huh!?!

TIMOTHY  
What???

MURIEL

Bob...Tim, Tom.

BARBARA

Hi, there! You'll forgive me if I'm a little confused. Actually, I'm Barbara. Barbara O'Leary. How do you do? Tim? Tom?

*(She offers a hand to Tom. The following four speeches overlap.)*

TOM

No, Bob. I'm Tom. He's Tim.

BARBARA

No. Please. Barbara.

TIMOTHY

It's the other way around. He's Tom.

TOM

Oh, I'm sorry. Now who's confused?

*(This is followed by more laughter.)*

TIMOTHY

Well, now that that's not settled, let's have a seat, shall we? *(To BARBARA)* May I fix you a drink?

BARBARA

Not just yet, thank you. I've come from a little celebration. Forgive me for talking shop, but Muriel, we finally finished! And what a day! I'm a mess!

TOM

*(Moving right in)* No way.

BARBARA

*(Really seeing him for the first time and liking what she sees; there is a brief charged moment between them.)* Thank you.

TIMOTHY

What did you finish?

BARBARA

Oh, I'm sorry. A group of commercials. Eleven in two weeks and we're exhausted, but it was worth it. They're marvelous! Sooooo, we had this 'lit-tle' celebration at the studio and I'm halfway to the moon on champagne.

*(TOM, although sincere, takes perverse delight in cutting into what he already senses to be MURIEL'S territory. TOM and TIMOTHY speak simultaneously.)*

TOM

I'm halfway to the moon on you.  
You're beautiful!

TIMOTHY

What are you doing on the commercials?  
Are you an actress?

BARBARA

I'm sorry... What...?

MURIEL

*(With a slight edge)* I think Tom just paid you a compliment.

BARBARA

*(To TIMOTHY)* Tom?

TIMOTHY

*(Shaking his head, and laughing)* Tim.

BARBARA

*(Pleasantly)* Oh, I'm sorry, Tim. *(To TOM)* Thank you, Tom...for whatever you said.

TOM

I said, 'you're beautiful.'

*(She only looks at him and smiles once again, their eyes holding a moment longer than necessary.)*

MURIEL

*(Uncomfortably)* I believe Timothy asked you a question, dear.

*(BARBARA looks at TIMOTHY.)*

TIMOTHY

I asked if you are an actress.

BARBARA

Oh, God forbid! No!

MURIEL

Careful, darling. You're in the presence of a most sensitive young man.

BARBARA

*(Not understanding)* What...?

TIMOTHY

What do you do?

BARBARA

I'm a production assistant. En route to being a producer.

MURIEL

And she'll be the best, too. I can tell you that!

BARBARA

*(Shyly)* Oh, Muriel...

MURIEL

*(Imitating her, but not unkindly)* Oh, Bob.

BARBARA

*('Easily')* Barbara. Please.

MURIEL

Sorry, dear.

TIMOTHY

Pardon me for being forward, but I'm absolutely fascinated by this 'Bob' bit.

MURIEL

*(Laughing)* But it's so obvious! She's so gloriously feminine, she just has to be called something 'butch' like 'Bob', don't you agree?

TOM

*(Being unable to resist it; enjoying himself thoroughly)* Or maybe 'Sluggo.' That's kinda' butch.

*(There is an awkward moment among the others, while MURIEL does a slow-burning 'take' on TOM.)*

BARBARA

*(To change the subject)* I think I will take that drink! What's good with champagne?

TOM

*(Right on top of it)* Anything your heart desires. What'll it be?

BARBARA

You decide.

TOM

Scotch and water. Or maybe wine, with the champagne.

BARBARA

Wine!

*(He goes to the bar.)*

MURIEL

*(To BARBARA)* I wish you'd been here for the discussion we were having! It was quite interesting.

TOM

There's got to be a better word.

MURIEL

Not at all. Tom's a writer.

BARBARA

*(Genuinely interested)* Are you!

TOM

*(With a broad Texas drawl)* Why, ma'm, them's the nicest words you've said about me since you got to these here parts.

*(BARBARA laughs. TOM is pleased.)*

MURIEL

That's not true. I've said many lovely things...

TOM

You never called me a writer.

MURIEL

But you are, Tom! And quite a good one. I do have a few more points I'd like to make, however... *(To BARBARA)* Would you mind, darling? It shouldn't take long.

TIMOTHY

No way, my friend. That party's over.

BARBARA

Oh, please, don't stop because of me.

TOM

It's just as well, Barbara. We were discussing a play of mine. She's not terribly fond of it.

MURIEL

Now, Tom...

TOM

*(Disappointed, angry, hurting)* You're not. I have to live with that.

*(There is an uncomfortable pause.)*

BARBARA

I love your apartment, Tim.

TIMOTHY

Thank you.

BARBARA

It's so warm. One of those places you feel comfortable in right away...

TIMOTHY

We like it.

*(Pause; the TELEPHONE RINGS in the den.)*

MURIEL

*(Glancing around the room and almost demanding)* Hey! Why don't you have a telephone in here!

TIMOTHY

There's one right next to you. It wants for privacy.

TOM

Want me to get it while I'm up?

MURIEL

*(Overlapping)* It also wants for a bell!

*(TELEPHONE RINGS again.)*

TIMOTHY

No, thanks. It's probably Madge.

MURIEL

So that's why you couldn't go out tonight!

TIMOTHY

Right on, baby!

*(TIMOTHY exits.)*

MURIEL

Those two could almost make you sick.

TOM

Or green. They're happy.

*(TOM hands a glass of wine to BARBARA.)*

BARBARA

*(Taking the wine)* Thank you... *(Subtly pointing up the name)* ...Tom...

TOM

You're welcome...Barbara...

*(TOM sinks onto the sofa next to BARBARA, smiling at her. Beat; BARBARA attempts to distract him, and her, and MURIEL.)*

BARBARA

What's your play about, Tom?

TOM

*(Looking directly into her eyes)* Love.

BARBARA

*(A little laugh)* I like it already.

TOM

Heterosexual...love. *(To MURIEL)* Right, Muriel?

MURIEL

*(With a 'coy' laugh, and a sing-song rhythm)* I'm not so sure, Tommy.

TOM

I know. *(To BARBARA)* Will you excuse me while I say something to our friend?

BARBARA

Of course.

TOM

Muriel. For the last few minutes, you've been asking me questions. May I ask you a few?

MURIEL

Oh, dear. I think he wants me on trial.

TOM

No. I'm just a little curious about some things I discovered tonight.

MURIEL

Very well.

TOM

I know there's a lot you don't like about what I wrote, but why can't you accept the reality of the heterosexual experiences in my play? Why did you take that one moment and try to turn it into something sordid...perverse...perverted ...whatever?

MURIEL

*(Defensively)* That's your point-of-view. I never said it was any of those things.

TOM

*(Pressing the issue)* Why?

MURIEL

*(Too casually)* Because it's there.

TOM

No. My script deals with simple, straightforward emotions among simple, straight people.

MURIEL

I don't agree.

TOM

I wrote it, Muriel. I should be allowed to decide who – and what – my characters are.

MURIEL

You're too close to it.

TOM

Then you do want a play about faggots and closet queens.

MURIEL

No!

TOM

But you're suggesting Eddie's one.

MURIEL

*(Slightly flustered)* It's occurring to me that if you develop him along those lines you may have a more interesting play, yes...

TOM

Eddie is me, Muriel. Remember?

MURIEL

Yes, I do.

TOM

Then you're suggesting I'm a closet queen?

MURIEL

Good God, no!

TOM

It takes one to suspect one, you know.

MURIEL

*(Beat; she is momentarily stunned)* What the hell are you trying to do, Tom!

TOM

Nothing. I just sense that you have a rather...unique ...perspective on things.

MURIEL

*(Exploding)* And I sense that you're a smart ass!

BARBARA

Muriel!

TOM

Hey, pull back! I didn't mean that as an indictment.

MURIEL

*(Overlapping)* So I'm going to tell you something, sonny. If you really want to know what I think about that play, you're going to hear it. You're going to hear it in spades!

TOM

Did I press a button or what?

MURIEL

*(Riding over him)* But some other time. I'm not going to cast a pall over this evening, and I certainly won't subject Bobbie to it. I will tell you, though, Tom.

TOM

Muriel...

MURIEL

But I will hate to do it, because I think you're fragile. I think you can't take it!

TOM

*(Exploding)* Okay, that's enough! I can take it, and you know it! You're not saying it because you can't take it!

MURIEL

You see how you are? How you...twist...things to fit your own needs?

TOM

And my twisting deals with two things you wouldn't know anything about—sensitivity and TALENT!!!

MURIEL

You're not making any sense at all!

TOM

The only sense I haven't made was giving the script to you in the first place!

*(A deep silence settles over the room. TOM finishes his drink. Soon, though, TIMOTHY opens the den door, sticks his head out.)*

TIMOTHY

Hey, Tom. It's Madge. She wants to say 'hello.'

TOM

*(Relieved for the opportunity to get out of the room)* Oh... Oh, good! I'll be right there.  
*(Pointedly ignoring MURIEL)* Excuse me, Barbara.

*(As TOM exits, it is apparent that he is quite high. Also, it is taking all his strength to keep from pummeling MURIEL. )*

TIMOTHY

*(To TOM as he passes)* She won the first round at bridge. Congratulate her. *(To MURIEL and BARBARA)* We'll be right back.

*(They exit and close the door. MURIEL is stunned. She suddenly clutches for a chair, gasping for air. She is having a panic attack.)*

MURIEL

My God...! Oh, my God...

BARBARA

*(Leaning over and taking her hand; soothing her)* Come on, now... Come on, Sweetheart... If he'd talked to me like that I'd crumble. But you're too strong. Come on, now. Please?

MURIEL

*(Choking back tears of hurt, anger, and fear)* Thank you, Bob.

BARBARA

*(A gentle plea)* And please don't call me that. I don't mind when we're alone – really alone – if you want to. But please don't do it around other people.

MURIEL

Oh, stop it! You adore it!

BARBARA

*(A sudden commanding attitude)* I don't! *(Then, sweetly)* I adore you. *(Kisses MURIEL who looks at her a long moment. MURIEL is confused; frightened.)* Muriel...? *(MURIEL doesn't respond.)* What's wrong?

MURIEL

I shouldn't have brought you here. It was a mistake.

BARBARA

It was not a mistake! Timothy has a right to know about us.

MURIEL

But that boy...!

BARBARA

Honey, we love each other. We have nothing to be ashamed of.

MURIEL

*(Beat; a quiet, contemplative moment)* Oh, how I envy you. Your spirit. Your...freedom. This...time of your life. It was so different when I was young. Everyone was so repressed!

BARBARA

*(Glancing toward the den)* We may not want to get into this now.

MURIEL

*(Suddenly testy)* Why? It's no big deal. I simply said I envy you.

BARBARA

No, it isn't a big deal. We do, however, sometimes manage to make it one.

MURIEL

*(Defensively)* No. I admire your freedom. I respect it. I only wish I had it.

BARBARA

My freedom isn't a threat, Muriel. I've explained that to you.

MURIEL

I'm just so afraid you'll misuse it, that's all...

BARBARA

We are going to get into it, aren't we?

MURIEL

Of course, we're not. I just don't understand...why...it has to be. You're young, you're bright, you're beautiful...

BARBARA

*(As if quoting)* "I'm insecure. I crave attention. It's immature and unnecessary." We've been through this, Muriel.

MURIEL

Attention's one thing, darling, but your need for it is a bit— [excessive, don't you think?]

BARBARA

*(Cutting her off)* Honey...

MURIEL

You keep saying I make you feel so good about yourself.

BARBARA

And you do. But I like to flirt, and occasionally I like to... *(Stops herself)* But I don't think it's so terrible, either. And I've been honest with you. From the very beginning you've known that this is the way I am.

MURIEL

And it shouldn't be a threat.

BARBARA

*(With urgent frustration)* It isn't.

MURIEL

If I would only believe that...

*(MURIEL turns away again. She is trying not to cry.)*

BARBARA

I love you, Muriel. I love you. No one else.

MURIEL

*(Quickly, and with longing)* I know you do. I think I know you do.

BARBARA

*(Sweetly)* How many times do I have to tell you?

MURIEL

At least once with every attack.

BARBARA

I won't let you get away with that. You don't have that many.

MURIEL

And I don't even understand those! I'm basically a very secure person.

BARBARA

*(Brightly)* So am I. Basically! So what are we talking about?

MURIEL

*(Laughing)* Who knows! It must be menopause!

BARBARA

*(Laughing)* Stop that! Come here. I want a hug.

MURIEL

Well, so do I!

*(They embrace. TIMOTHY enters.)*

TIMOTHY

*(Over his shoulder)* Turn the phone off when you're through! *(MURIEL breaks the embrace sharply, turns away, embarrassed.)* Did you hear me tell Tom that Madge... *(Senses the moment and stops)* Ohoh... Is there a problem?

BARBARA

*(Covering the moment)* Not really. Our friends locked horns there for a minute, but she's all right, now.

TIMOTHY

*(Trying to keep it light)* You sure?*(To MURIEL)* For a lady who holds her own so well, you're a couple of shades paler than usual.

*(His tack doesn't work. Her rage is rapid in returning.)*

MURIEL

He's a monster, Timothy.

TIMOTHY

*(Having seen MURIEL's tantrums before; calmly)* Is he?

MURIEL

I read that script only because he was a client and a friend of yours. And I will not go back on what I said. The boy does have talent. But he is a monster!

TIMOTHY

*(Hoping to calm her)* Muriel...

MURIEL

*(Unable and unwilling to stop)* He was rude to me time and again before we started, and now, he has turned on me and hurt me like I can't even tell you. And it is only because I didn't like his play! I'm not sure how you feel about it, Tim, but I would think you weren't terribly fond of it, either!

TIMOTHY

I liked it very much.

MURIEL

How's that possible!

TIMOTHY

It's a good play.

MURIEL

It's a terrible play!

TIMOTHY

We needn't get into this now, Muriel. Tom's hurt you, and knowing him I suspect he owes you an apology.

MURIEL

You're damned right!

TIMOTHY

Then I'll ask him to apologize. And then...may we please leave the play and get on to something else?

*(TOM comes back into the room. His talk with Madge has soothed him a bit; nevertheless, he is still suppressing enormous frustration and anger.)*

TOM

*(Referring to Madge)* I'm glad she won.

TIMOTHY

So am I.

TOM

*(Pause)* She told me she liked my pictures...like you said...

TIMOTHY

Tom...

TOM

You want me to apologize.

TIMOTHY

Apparently you want to or you wouldn't have mentioned it.

TOM

*(Preparing a defense)* Timothy, I—

TIMOTHY

*(Overlapping)* Hold it! *(To MURIEL)* Just before Barbara arrived you were doing more than giving him helpful criticisms. You were goading him. Now, I don't know what he said to you, but I saw his condition as he left the room and I know what he can do to people when he's like that. So, Tom, I'm not taking sides, but I am certain you owe her an apology. At the same time, I think she owes you one.

TOM

No, no, no. What does she have to apologize for? She can't help it if she can't read a script.

MURIEL

Just listen to him, for Christ's sake!

TIMOTHY

Muriel! Now, look, Tom, quite obviously she can read a script.

TOM

*(Frustrated; struggling)* I'm sorry. I didn't mean it like that. She didn't like my play. It made me mad. Why should she apologize for not liking it. You didn't.

TIMOTHY

Have you lost your mind! I loved it!

TOM

Then why didn't you stand up for me??

TIMOTHY

We'd better get off this, Tom.

TOM

You didn't like it, did you? It's that simple.

TIMOTHY

*(Firmly)* We're not going to talk about it, anymore, Tom.

TOM

*(Determined not to let it go)* But! Do you know why you didn't like it!!

TIMOTHY

*(Incredulous)* I just told you, I— [do like it!]

TOM

*(Not allowing him to continue)* Since I've become your client, it's the only thing I've done – professionally, and practically otherwise – that you had nothing – absolutely nothing to do with. You were going to make me a star, so big, and now you're getting the impression – and the right impression – that I don't want to be a star! I've written a play. And it's good. And I may not need you at all anymore. And you can't stand that! You've got to be needed. You've got to be in charge. You've got to pull the strings. Okay. Pull the strings! Put me down. Put my play down. But—get me the deal you promised. I'll give you a week!

TIMOTHY

Tom you're very drunk...

MURIEL

This is ridiculous! Stop it, Tom! *(Silence; then she begins her attack.)* Tim, what is this 'deal' shit? You didn't tell him you were going to get him a deal! Not with me, I hope! He's talented, but he's not that talented!

BARBARA

*(Intensely uncomfortable)* Muriel...

MURIEL

(To BARBARA) SSSssshhh!! (To TIMOTHY) Oh, God, Tim, you didn't...

TOM

Yes, he did!!! He said you'd love it!

MURIEL

So he was wrong! So what! Isn't it enough that he's kept you working more than nine-tenths of the actors alive in the world today! What do you expect from a lawyer, for Christ's sake!

TOM

You're changing the subject.

MURIEL

What subject? You're so paranoid I never know what subject you're on— unless it's yourself!

TOM

You obviously don't know the meaning of the word.

MURIEL

Which word? 'Paranoid' or 'yourself?' In reference to you, they're synonymous!

TOM

Shut your hole!

TIMOTHY

(Overlapping) Tom! Muriel! Cut it!!!

TOM

(Cornered, panicked, desperate) For God's sake! What do you two want from me!?!

MURIEL

A play!

TOM

About faggots and closet queens!!!

MURIEL

(To no one in particular) God, he's sick.

TOM

To my stomach. I can't stand low people in high places.

MURIEL

(Turning away from him) Jesus!

(Silence.)

TIMOTHY

*(With a deep sigh)* Forgive them, Barbara, but as I've said many time before, Tom and Muriel are truly the most revolting two people I know when they're drunk.

TOM and MURIEL, *Together*

I-am-not-drunk!!!

*(TOM and MURIEL literally do a 'take' on one another. The two of them, saying the line in unison, is so outrageous they have no choice but to laugh. Suddenly, everyone is laughing. It is a great release for all of them. They relax, become very quiet. TOM breaks the silence.)*

TOM

*(Extremely embarrassed)* Oh, crap! I'm sorry, Muriel.

MURIEL

That's all right, darling. Forget it.

*(Silence.)*

TOM

*(Too ashamed to look at him.; very quietly to TIMOTHY)* I'm sorry, Timothy.

TIMOTHY

I know you are, Tom. *(Smiles, leans forward, and slaps TOM on the knee)* I'll get over it.

TOM

*(Barely audible; unable to look at anyone)* I'm sorry. I didn't mean any of that. I'm sorry... I'm really sorry...

*(There is a short pause and then TOM hurries out the front door, slamming it behind him.)*

MURIEL

Where's he going?

TIMOTHY

To pull himself together, I hope.

MURIEL

Oh... *(Beat)* Does he do this often?

TIMOTHY

Only when he thinks he's made a complete and utter fool of himself. *(Stops)* Yes. Often.

MURIEL

*(With genuine compassion)* Poor baby. *(Beat)* Timothy...if you want to go after him...

No. TIMOTHY

I don't think he should be alone. MURIEL

I'll go if you want me to. *(Starts after him)* BARBARA

*(Quickly)* Barbara, no! You don't even know him! MURIEL

I'll be right back! BARBARA

But you just met...! MURIEL

*(BARBARA is gone. In the silence that follows TIMOTHY moves to the desk on which is the photograph of Timmy. He picks it up. He is profoundly moved by the moment. MURIEL studies him as he puts the photograph down and starts for the bar.)*

*(Preoccupied)* How's your drink? TIMOTHY

I'm surprised you asked. MURIEL

It was a slip of the tongue. TIMOTHY

*(Glancing back at the photograph as she moves to Timothy)* Timothy...are you all right...? MURIEL

*(Pause)* Our son, Timmy, would have been Tom's age now, you know... TIMOTHY

*(Quietly; understanding)* Yes... MURIEL

Yes... TIMOTHY

*(The moment is over; he takes his drink and moves back to MURIEL.)*

TIMOTHY, *Continued*

Well! (*Beat; a change in mood*) Tell me something...am I as possessive as Tom seems to think?

MURIEL

Probably. And who's to care? It's a manager's birthright.

TIMOTHY

I'm a lawyer.

MURIEL

So you are. And a good one.

TIMOTHY

(*Beat; engrossed in thought*) I didn't like hearing that, Muriel.

MURIEL

He was drunk.

TIMOTHY

Yeah.

(*There is another silence while MURIEL just studies TIMOTHY, then she takes a deep breath.*)

MURIEL

(*With as much ease as she can muster*) Forgive me, Timothy, but I have to ask you this... I know it's particularly inappropriate at this moment, but I have to ask...

TIMOTHY

(*Resigning himself to the fact that MURIEL, in her own inimitable style, is about to 'do a number' on him*) Go ahead. You've been preparing me for it all evening.

MURIEL

Are you in love with him?

TIMOTHY

Of course, not.

MURIEL

He loves you.

TIMOTHY

He probably does. I'm a father. A...surrogate...

MURIEL

It's more than that.

Muriel, he's a child.

TIMOTHY

At twenty-whatever!?

MURIEL

Age has nothing to do with it. All my clients are children.

TIMOTHY

We must have the same list.

MURIEL

We're off the subject. You wanted to tell me something.

TIMOTHY

To ask you something. I'm waiting for an honest answer.

MURIEL

A circuitous route to another place.

TIMOTHY

Wrong. Tom's been obnoxious all evening. And you've allowed it. That's not your style.

MURIEL

You've been obnoxious, and I've allowed that.

TIMOTHY

I'm a friend.

MURIEL

Tom's a friend. And client.

TIMOTHY

And more.

MURIEL

*(Beat)* What are you trying to do, Muriel?

TIMOTHY

Understand something.

MURIEL

Why?

TIMOTHY

I've seen you with clients. I've seen you with friends. You're different with him.

MURIEL

TIMOTHY

He has more needs than most.

MURIEL

And being that father figure, you naturally want to satisfy them.

TIMOTHY

Yes. I like him.

MURIEL

Love him.

TIMOTHY

All right.

MURIEL

Aha! How does Madge feel about that?

TIMOTHY

She loves him, too. He's quite a special young man.

MURIEL

Behind that asshole facade.

TIMOTHY

*(Having to smile)* Yes. Admittedly, tonight it would be difficult to believe that behind that...asshole facade...as you so delicately put it, is a warm, sensitive, sometimes – on a good day – even genuinely caring young man.

MURIEL

*(Feeling a twinge of regret that she has been so abrupt)* Oh, he can be charming, there's no doubt about that...

TIMOTHY

I'm not talking about charm. I'm talking about deeper things. The things that Madge and I love in him...

MURIEL

The things I clearly haven't seen tonight...

TIMOTHY

*(A wry smile)* Clearly. He's wound pretty tight right now. His play means a lot to him...

MURIEL

I know. And if you say those...deeper...things are there, they must be...

They are. TIMOTHY

Then why am I worried about you? MURIEL

*(Gently)* What are you doing? TIMOTHY

I think he'll hurt you... MURIEL

That's not it. TIMOTHY

...and Madge! *(Beat)* You do know he's an alcoholic. MURIEL

No. Do you? TIMOTHY

*(Flippantly)* It takes one to 'suspect' one... As the saying goes... MURIEL

What are you doing, Muriel? TIMOTHY

About what...? MURIEL

You're coming apart. TIMOTHY

Am I...?. MURIEL

Yes. What's going on...? TIMOTHY

I have nothing to say. MURIEL

Yes, you do. And it's not about Tom. TIMOTHY

Stop pressing me. MURIEL

Talk. TIMOTHY

And stop behaving like a lawyer. MURIEL

Why are you forcing this issue about Tom? TIMOTHY

I'm taking the Fifth. MURIEL

Why? TIMOTHY

Why?why?why??? Will you stop it! MURIEL

Would you rather I told you? TIMOTHY

(Suddenly spitting it out) I'm afraid! All right!?! Aw, who the fuck cares! MURIEL

(Firmly) Drop the fucks. You're a bright and articulate woman. You may need them out there, but not here. Not with me. TIMOTHY

(Glibly) What's wrong with an occasional fuck? MURIEL

(A command) Muriel! Sit down! TIMOTHY

(She is startled, and tries to resist, but he won't look away, nor will he speak. She sits. This is followed by silence.)

(Finally, and very simply to herself) This was not supposed to happen here. Not tonight... (Still, almost relieved) How long have you known? MURIEL

Since she arrived. TIMOTHY

(A sigh and a sad, little laugh) I wish I'd known you knew. (Beat almost to herself) God, I'm exhausted. MURIEL

TIMOTHY

You're relieved. How long have you been together?

MURIEL

Three months.

TIMOTHY

How long have you known her?

MURIEL

You're relentless.

TIMOTHY

How long?

MURIEL

Six months.

TIMOTHY

...oh...

MURIEL

Or seven. I'm not sure. It doesn't matter. We were bonded from another life.

TIMOTHY

You were what...?

MURIEL

Reincarnation. We were friends, lovers, something in another life.

TIMOTHY

Do you believe in that?

MURIEL

No. But it explains unexplainables.

TIMOTHY

Like love at first sight.

MURIEL

If something so startling and beautiful needs explaining.

TIMOTHY

Then you're happy.

MURIEL

I've never experienced anything like it. She excites me. She angers me. She disturbs me. She enchants me. She frightens me. She calms me. Is loving always so intense? Or is it because it's all so new? And wondrous. And dangerous! Whatever—I've never felt so alive in my life!

TIMOTHY

*(Laughing)* In a word, yes.

MURIEL

What?

TIMOTHY

I'd asked if you're happy.

MURIEL

Oh, yes! *(Beat)* Sometimes. *(Becoming more subdued)* And no. *(Beat)* Sometimes.

TIMOTHY

*(Smiling)* Join the human race.

MURIEL

*(With an edge of bitterness)* Thank you, but I don't think perverts are quite welcome there.

TIMOTHY

What?! Where'd that come from?

MURIEL

*(Once more covering with an attempt at humor)* I'm a Southern Baptist, honey. The Wrath of God's in every gene!

TIMOTHY

But...pervert...?

MURIEL

*(A brief explosion of self-pitying anger)* Do you know another word for it? How many dykes do you adore?!

TIMOTHY

*(Simply)* One. Very much. She's my best friend.

*(MURIEL is deeply touched by this, and not quite being able to handle it, she looks away. TIMOTHY changes the focus.)*

TIMOTHY, *Continued*

Barbara said she's a production assistant.

Yes.

MURIEL

Where?

TIMOTHY

Luther/Labine's. *(Beat)* They do commercials. *(Longer beat)* I helped her get her job.

MURIEL

I could tell.

TIMOTHY

How?

MURIEL

Her enthusiasm. And the way she shared it with you. You had to have been part of it.

TIMOTHY

Yes. *(Beat; then, quickly)* She'll be very good, too...

MURIEL

I would expect her to be.

TIMOTHY

*(With a giddy, nervous edge)* She's quite a contemporary young woman, you know.

MURIEL

I'm never quite sure what that means.

TIMOTHY

*(Too enthusiastically)* Liberated! Free! Handling herself in a man's world!

MURIEL

*(Studying her carefully)* Oh.

TIMOTHY

And, of course, it's so much easier for young people these days. Standards, values, mores have changed so...as they should and... I mean, young people are so much more spontaneous now; less repressed; it's wonderful!

MURIEL

*(Sensing her pain)* How?

TIMOTHY

MURIEL

Well, they... *(Stops, looks at him for a moment, knows she can't deceive him, and moves into what is really troubling her)* Barbara will...occasionally...sleep...with someone...else, Tim. A woman, usually. A man, sometimes. *(Very quickly)* But it's all right. To many young people there is a...a yawning chasm between love and...sex...

TIMOTHY

*(Quietly)* I see.

MURIEL

But, of course, they can go together...sometimes...love and sex. Barbara and I certainly have both.

TIMOTHY

*(Aching for her)* You're very fortunate.

MURIEL

Yes! *(Beat)* So why am I so insecure? She adores me, I'm certain of that. But this incredible need she has for attention. *(Becoming angry)* Talk to me, touch me, feel me, fuck me! Why, Tim? She's so attractive, she's so bright...

TIMOTHY

Sounds like she's insecure, too.

MURIEL

But she doesn't have to be!

TIMOTHY

*(Easily)* Neither do you. *(Beat)* Neither do I.

MURIEL

Then you're condoning it!

TIMOTHY

I'm only reminding you that we're people. All of us have something to work out.

MURIEL

But why does her something have to be that!

TIMOTHY

*(Laughing)* Ya' got me!

MURIEL

And I've sure as hell got me! *(Suddenly, she shivers and is almost tough again as she looks around.)* Where in God's name did that come from?

TIMOTHY  
You're frightened.

MURIEL  
I meant the draft.

TIMOTHY  
There wasn't a draft. You're frightened.

MURIEL  
All right, I'm frightened! Still! Give a girl a break!

TIMOTHY  
No more. You've been fighting this battle for as long as I've known you.

MURIEL  
*(Overlapping)* Longer. But I didn't know you knew. And I'm furious about it.

TIMOTHY  
Christ, Muriel! I'm your friend! I love you! How could I not know?

MURIEL  
*(Ignoring him and beginning to feel sorry for herself, again)* Is it because I'm mannish? Is that how you knew?

TIMOTHY  
*(More to himself as he begins to lose patience)* Good God.

MURIEL  
Is that how you knew? Am I mannish?

TIMOTHY  
No. You're boring, indulgent, and dull! Now, cut it out!

MURIEL  
*(Blurting it out)* How would you like to be homosexual!

TIMOTHY  
I'd like it, if it turned me on!

MURIEL  
How can you say that!

TIMOTHY  
Because I like anything that's me!

MURIEL

Open and shut! Well, I don't believe you. I think if you were a faggot you'd hate it and deny it and build a custom closet to hide it in.

TIMOTHY

Them's strong words, lady.

MURIEL

I think you'd loathe being gay, Timothy. I know you would.

TIMOTHY

Well, you're wrong.

MURIEL

How can you be so sure?

TIMOTHY

Because I am gay. And I like it.

*(There is a long moment. MURIEL scrutinizes him. She is simultaneously stunned, relieved and suspicious.)*

MURIEL

You are?? You really are!?

TIMOTHY

Three years ago, when I first opened that door to Tommy Brouder, I took one look at the boy and my life changed. My heart stopped, my mouth went dry, my knees trembled...I was in shock. But some things you don't fight. It was love. Just like that. I was in love with a man. Happily, Tommy felt it, too.

MURIEL

*(Enchanted, she is caught up in the romance of it)* Tommy...? Oh, I like that. I don't quite see him as a 'Tommy,' but it's so sweet...

TIMOTHY

On an intimate level he appreciates the diminutive. Leaves him secure in the weaker position of the child.

MURIEL

That certainly fits the picture.

TIMOTHY

May I go on?

MURIEL

Please do.

TIMOTHY

We've been lovers ever since. Sex three times a day. Sometimes four. On the floor. In the shower. Once right there where you're sitting. (*MURIEL suppresses a shudder.*) Tiring at my age. But worth it. We do have one problem, however. Other than his basic needing, demanding, sometimes obnoxious nature, I'm finding he's a bit long in the tooth for me, now. Twenty-five is just about my upper limit, it appears. Twenty-six? That's pushing it. Oh, well, we'll either work it out or we won't. There. Happy?

(*He notes MURIEL's incredulous expression and bursts into gales of laughter.*)

MURIEL

(*'Outraged,' and amused*) You were putting me on! You bastard! You stinking bastard!

TIMOTHY

Isn't that what you wanted to hear?

MURIEL

No! But the horror of it is, I almost believe it!

TIMOTHY

(*Laughing*) Don't. Madge and I are happy together, Muriel. I want you and Barbara to be, too.

MURIEL

(*Too enthusiastically*) And we are! We really are! (*Beat; changing the subject*) Will Madge understand?

TIMOTHY

About you two?

MURIEL

Yes.

TIMOTHY

What do you think?

MURIEL

(*Genuinely, and almost childlike*) She was certainly gracious when I groped her.

TIMOTHY

(*Laughs*) You were drinking. You lost your balance.

MURIEL

Nevertheless, she was gracious. (*Beat*) And I didn't lose my balance.

TIMOTHY

Whatever you say.

MURIEL

*(Suddenly hugging him tightly, and beginning to cry softly)* Of, Timothy, I'm so lucky to have you! Thank you. *(They hold each other quietly for a few moments.)* Thank you. *(Pause)*

TIMOTHY

You're trembling.

MURIEL

*(Burying her head in his chest)* I'm so afraid I'll lose her, Tim. I can't help it. I've never been in love. Not really. Not like this. And I'm so afraid...

TIMOTHY

Can't you just let it happen a day at a time?

*(MURIEL moves away from him. She has difficulty speaking, but she must hear herself say it.)*

MURIEL

There is a poem.

*I am no good at love.  
I betray it with little sins.  
For I feel the misery of the end,  
The moment it begins.  
And the bitterness of the last goodbye  
Is the bitterness that wins.*

Noel Coward wrote that. That brilliant, vital, witty man. *(Pause)* I wish I'd known Noel Coward. *(Sniffles; TIMOTHY offers her a handkerchief)* Thank you. *(Blows her nose and returns the handkerchief; has a thought; suddenly awed)* Oh, my God! Something has just become very clear to me. *(Beat)* I'm not afraid of what I am. *(Beat)* I'm afraid of what I feel! *(Begins to laugh)* Timothy! I'm a cliché! *(It becomes a delicious, bubbly laugh)* How marvelous! *(Another revelation)* And how remarkable! I just produced a primal scream, and I hardly made a sound! *(Ecstatic)* What do I owe you, Doctor!

TIMOTHY

*(Laughing)* The first one's on me.

MURIEL

I'll drink to that! *(Lifts her glass in a toast and brings it to her lips)* What am I doing? I don't need this!

TIMOTHY

I wouldn't be rash.

MURIEL

I feel good. Why take a chance?

TIMOTHY  
That sounds familiar.

MURIEL  
What...?

TIMOTHY  
Tom. Earlier.

MURIEL  
Now, don't you worry about Tom. It takes two to battle, and I, for one, am going to be good.

TIMOTHY  
Praise God!

MURIEL  
*(A momentary burst of joy)* Oh, I'm so glad you approve! *(TIMOTHY doesn't respond)* Of Barbara... *(Still no response)* You...do approve of her, don't you...?

*(Before TIMOTHY can answer, TOM and BARBARA are heard approaching the apartment. They are laughing and clowning and enjoying themselves thoroughly.)*

MURIEL  
Aaaagggghh!! Here they come and I'm a mess! Bag! Where's my... *(Spots it)* Oh, there it is! I'll be right back!

*(She starts for the kitchen.)*

TIMOTHY  
That's the kitchen!

MURIEL  
I know! I need ice. For the puffs!

TIMOTHY  
There're some here!

MURIEL  
Private ones! Don't go away!

*(MURIEL disappears into the kitchen. TIMOTHY looks after her, concerned, then takes a deep breath, glances toward the sounds of TOM and BARBARA that are coming from the corridor, goes to the door and opens it. TOM, all smiles, is about to ring the buzzer.)*

TOM  
Hi!

TIMOTHY

Hi! Feeling better?

TOM

*(Entering)* A lot. *(One arm is behind him. He is concealing something.)* Where's the pretty lady?

TIMOTHY

*(A bit nonplused)* Muriel...?!?

TOM

Yeah.

TIMOTHY

The 'pretty lady's' in the kitchen.

TOM

Making coffee, maybe, huh?

TIMOTHY

It's made. Would you like some?

TOM

Yeah.

BARBARA

I'll get it. Through there?

TIMOTHY

Yes. Thanks. Just plug it in.

*(BARBARA starts for the kitchen, but is soon stopped by MURIEL's voice off.)*

MURIEL *(O.S.)*

*(Shouting)* You people stay out of here!

*(BARBARA stops, looks at TIM and laughs.)*

BARBARA

I've had a sudden change in plans.

TOM

What's she doing?

*(TIMOTHY shrugs his shoulders and looks blank.)*

TIMOTHY

Plugging in the coffee?

TOM

*(Calling to MURIEL)* Hey, Muriel, I've got something for you.

MURIEL *(O.S.)*

I'll be out in a minute!

TOM

It won't wait.

MURIEL *(O.S.)*

It'll have to!

TOM

*(Shrugs)* It'll have to.

*(TOM brings the arm from behind his back. He is carrying a small bouquet of fresh flowers, which he tosses casually into the corner of the sofa.)*

TOM, *Continued*

So! What's up? We've covered my play. Oh, boy, have we covered my play!

TIMOTHY

*(Referring to the flowers)* Are those for Muriel?

TOM

Yeah. Nice, huh? *(TIMOTHY goes to pick up the flowers)* Annnd we've eaten the food. We've drunk the booze. What can we do now that's...magical... *(With innuendo to BARBARA)* ...and acceptable in public! *(Beat)* Aht! I've got it! *(Starts across the room to the stereo)* What'll it be? Show tunes? Country? Disco? Jazz?

BARBARA

*(Joining him)* I don't care. You decide.

TOM

Tim?

TIMOTHY

Something classical might be nice. *(Indicating the flowers)* Where'd you get these?

TOM

Victor's. On the corner. Classical?!?

TIMOTHY

Whatever. Just keep it low. Neighbors.

TOM

*(Calling)* Hey, Muriel. What do you like? Show tunes? Country? Disco? Jazz?

MURIEL

*(Entering)* You name it; I'll like it. *(Going to Barbara)* You weren't gone long.

BARBARA

It started to rain.

MURIEL

Why, that's amazing! It was so clear when I arrived.

TOM

*(In good humor)* Yes, it was. *(With a sweeping gesture)* Everywhere!

MURIEL

*(Laughing)* I'm not going to fight with you.

TOM

*(Breezing passed TIMOTHY and taking the flowers from him)* I'm not going to fight with you, either. *(Hands her the flowers)* Here. Truce?

MURIEL

*(Genuinely touched)* Why, Tom...! How sweet! Truce!

*(She kisses him on a cheek.)*

TIMOTHY

Will wonders never cease!

BARBARA

Amazing!

TOM

*(To BARBARA)* You're what's amazing!

*(TOM strides to BARBARA, grabs her buttocks with both hands and pulls her to him, pressing his pelvis tightly against hers. She screams and giggles uncomfortably.)*

BARBARA

Unhand me, vile man!

*(BARBARA beats on his chest, pretending that she is trying to get out of his clutches, which with playful struggle, she eventually does.)*

*(MURIEL doesn't like this. Anger comes up rapidly, but she controls herself, and goes to TIMOTHY.)*

MURIEL

So much for truces!

TIMOTHY

Muriel...

MURIEL

Either he's trying to prove something, or I'm in big trouble.

TIMOTHY

He's not trying to prove anything.

MURIEL

Then I'm in big trouble.

TIMOTHY

They're just having fun.

MURIEL

*(Dryly)* Darling, fucking is fun. Which is not to say I'd like them to be doing it.

TIMOTHY

I thought you'd agreed to understand that sort of thing.

MURIEL

You didn't think that for a minute AND— if he doesn't take his hands off her, I'll bust his ass! Where's my drink?

TIMOTHY

You gave it up.

MURIEL

That was then. This is now. I'm startin' fresh! *(‘Sweetly’, to BARBARA)* Can I fix you something, Barbara?

BARBARA

No, thanks.

TOM

Did you plug the coffee in?

MURIEL

*(Grandly)* I may fix my drink first?

TOM

Please do.

MURIEL

Thank you. *(As she mixes her drink)* Anybody else for coffee?

BARBARA

Not me.

TIMOTHY

I don't think so. Thanks.

MURIEL

All righty! One hot coffee coming up!

*(As she goes toward the kitchen, she passes TOM and BARBARA and addresses them as a sweet, Southern Belle might do.)*

MURIEL, *Continued*

Are you two startin' a family? *(Exits to kitchen)*

BARBARA

*(Steps back from TOM, intimidated by MURIEL's remarks)* Where were we? Oh! Music!

TOM

Right! Music! *(Puts a hand over eyes)* Eeeny, Meeny, Miney, Mo! *(Pulls a cassette out; looks at it)* Hummm. Pretty good. How about it? You like this one? *(Holds up cassette)*

BARBARA

I've never heard of it.

TOM

*(As he puts it in)* It's great. Sexy. You like to dance?

BARBARA

Doesn't everybody?

*(MUSIC UP: A disco-derivative with a rich, sensual, primitive beat. BARBARA begins to move, quite naturally, but very subtly, and seductively.)*

BARBARA, *Continued*

Ummm. That's good.

TOM

*(Looking at her, all of her, from top to bottom)* I'll say.

*(MURIEL enters with a mug of coffee. She stops and listens to the music.)*

MURIEL

*(Playing at being 'groovy')* OOOooo! That is hot!

TOM

*(Never taking his eyes from BARBARA's body)* And if she keeps moving like that, I'm going to get hot!

MURIEL

*(Putting a hand on a hip; in a lispy, wispy voice)* My, my! Super Stud strikes, again!

TOM

*(Menacingly')* You're gonna get it.

MURIEL

Darling, I wouldn't be caught dead with it. *(Handing him the mug)* Drink this. It's good for the glands.

TOM

I warned you, lady!

*(Laughing, TOM reaches for MURIEL, grabbing her in a bear hug.)*

MURIEL

*(Imitating BARBARA)* Unhand me, vile man! *(Straight)* All right, that's enough. Drink up. I'm going to show you two how it's done. Go on. Drink up!

TOM

*(Surprised)* You like to dance?

MURIEL

Is a pig's ass pork? Drink!

*(TOM takes a sip of the coffee then puts the cup down.)*

MURIEL, *Continued*

This way.

*(MURIEL leads him into the middle of the room, and begins to move. Remarkably well. TOM is amazed. BARBARA moves to TIMOTHY.)*

BARBARA

I'm afraid you're stuck with me, Timothy. Would you like to dance?

TIMOTHY

No. No, thank you. I don't think so. I'm not comfortable dancing.

BARBARA

Oh, it isn't really dancing, anymore. It's just...moving...

*(And she does her seductive thing which TIMOTHY can't seem to resist.)*

TIMOTHY

Yes. Well...Why not!

*(TIMOTHY begins to dance. He is very shy about it, but attempts to give it his all.)*

BARBARA

Timothy, you're fabulous! *(He isn't.)* Now, aren't you glad you let yourself go?

TIMOTHY

*(Dryly)* I'm ecstatic.

*(BARBARA laughs a charming laugh. They dance a few moments, and then MURIEL calls for attention.)*

MURIEL

Ohoh! I feel it happenin'! Watch out, kids! Your mama's blastin' off! *(Goes into an elaborate combination of steps)*

TOM

Ye Gods! Get a load of her!

MURIEL

Top that, Tiger.

TOM

You're on!

*(He does. He is exceptionally good. BARBARA applauds.)*

TOM

*(With a flourish)* I thank you! Your turn!

BARBARA

Oh, no. I'll just stand here with Tim and...do my thing.

TOM

*(Playing right into it)* That's good enough for me.

*(TOM leaves MURIEL and begins dancing toward BARBARA. At first, MURIEL doesn't like it. But she recovers, goes after him, darts between them, picks up BARBARA's hand, and pulls her off to a corner of the room, shouting gaily over a shoulder.)*

MURIEL

Fruit basket turn over!

*(MURIEL and BARBARA dance, leaving TIM and TOM stranded. TOM is not particularly pleased.)*

TOM

*(Looking at TIMOTHY, as he begins to move sensuously, again)* Well. It looks like it's you and me, fella'.

TIMOTHY

*(A bit thrown)* No. No, I think I'll just sit this one out. It might be a good idea if you did, too.

TOM

Why?

TIMOTHY

In the name of propriety.

TOM

You're old fashioned, Tim.

TIMOTHY

*(Angered at TOM's glibness)* And you're on the brink. Pull back.

*(But TOM shrugs indifferently, turns away and begins to dance alone. Soon, though, he is aware that BARBARA is looking at him over MURIEL's shoulder. He only looks back and sends a few subtle messages a la a primitive movement here and there. BARBARA picks it up, smiles, and circles MURIEL so that they are now back-to-back, while she faces TOM, who is across the room. She's sending messages, too, but not quite so subtly as TOM. Her's are pure stripper, but superbly controlled, contained, and maddening. TOM responds and begins to work his way across the room to BARBARA, while TIMOTHY watches uncomfortably, then moves forward to cut in. But once TOM and BARBARA are face-to-face, and BARBARA sees TIMOTHY coming toward them, she quickly spins back into place in front of MURIEL, who looks behind her and right into the face of the gyrating TOM. At first, she is startled; then she looks him over from top to bottom.)*

MURIEL

What are you doing...!

TOM

*(A quick recovery and a real come-on)* Turnin' you on.

MURIEL

As if you could..... Oh, my God, you are! Where'd you learn that!

TOM

If I told you, you'd never speak to me, again.

MURIEL

Then don't tell me. Just do it. You may be changing my life!

*(MURIEL roars as he begins to move around her, sensuously, primitively.)*

TIMOTHY

*(Hating what he is seeing)* All right, Tom, that's enough.

MURIEL

*(Overlapping TIMOTHY)* Ummmm. I love it! More! More!

TOM

*(To MURIEL)* Why don't you try it?

MURIEL

You're on, sonny!

*(MURIEL gyrates seductively.)*

BARBARA

Muriel, you're marvelous!!

MURIEL

Don't I know it! Come on! Join in! It's fun!

BARBARA

No. No, no, I couldn't do that.

TOM

Awww, I bet you could. Come on! Come on! Give 'er a try!

BARBARA

No. No, I really couldn't.

MURIEL

Of course, you could, silly! It's simple! *(To TIMOTHY)* You try it, Timothy! It'll change your life!

TIMOTHY

*(Growing increasingly angry at TOM, and uncomfortable for MURIEL)* No, thanks. I know my limitations. This is one of them.

MURIEL

(Back to BARBARA) Then you have to, Bobbie!

(MURIEL is having so much fun that she's missed the fact that BARBARA is dancing, though very subtly. TOM, however, has not missed a moment of it and is thoroughly convinced that the 'performance' is entirely for him.)

TOM

(To BARBARA) Yeah! Yeah, that's it! Come on over here! (BARBARA starts toward him)  
Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!

(BARBARA has missed her calling. A Classier Burlesque Queen there's never been.)

MURIEL

(Finally noticing her) Oooooohhhh, my God! Let yourself go, honey! Rip off those repressions! Your mama's melting!!!

TOM

So's your papa! Take it off! Take it off!

BARBARA

(Freezing and laughing) Oh, stop it! No, I'm embarrassed.

MURIEL

You oughta be ashamed! Both of you!

TOM

I have no shame!

MURIEL

I can tell!

TOM

You want me to stop?!

MURIEL

Never!!!

TIMOTHY

(Shaking his head and moving away) This is a bloody madhouse!

(TOM is soon lost in the music. He has a natural affinity for movement. A fine sense of rhythm. A strong, sharp, clean style. And even in the midst of this 'controlled' pandemonium, he exhibits a flair which indicates that he is, no doubt, quite an effective performer. As he continues to move and becomes more involved with the music and the dancing, BARBARA notices TIMOTHY's concern and goes to him.)

BARBARA

What's wrong, Tim?

TIMOTHY

*(Unwilling to expose his feelings to her)* Nothing. Why?

BARBARA

This is upsetting you.

TIMOTHY

He looks foolish.

BARBARA

I think he's adorable.

TIMOTHY

I know you do.

BARBARA

*(Giving the impression that she's missed the point)* And Muriel's loving it.

TIMOTHY

Is she?

TOM

God, it's hot!

*(TOM takes off his coat and throws it on the sofa, or any piece of furniture which happens to be nearby.)*

MURIEL

Thaaaaaat's more like it, Sweetheart! Take it off!

TOM

*(Pulling back and laughing)* Oh, no! No. I wasn't going to... I just... I was getting hot...

MURIEL

I'll say! *(Clapping with the music)* Take it off! Take it off! Take it off! Take it off!  
Take it off! Take it off! Take it off!

TOM

*(Embarrassed, but enjoying the attention enormously)* Aw, come on, Muriel. Cut it out...!  
*(To BARBARA)* Barbara, you're the one who should be doing this...

BARBARA

No contest. You're marvelous. Keep moving. *(Begins clapping, too)*

TOM

No. I really I don't want to... *(He does want to.)*

MURIEL

Awwwgg, Tom, go on. Take it off! Take it off! Take it off! Take it off!

*(MURIEL starts after him. He is laughing, but backing away, sensing her implication, though it is, quite obviously, all in fun.)*

TOM

Get away from me, Muriel! Go on! Get away!

MURIEL

*(Sing-songy)* Take it off! Take it off! Take it off! Take it off!

*(TOM and MURIEL chase about the room as the music builds. Suddenly TOM stops.)*

TOM

Okay, Muriel! You're asking for it!

*(Laughing, TOM quickly runs from her, leans over, and before she realizes what has happened, he has taken off a shoe and tossed it in her direction. She catches it. Then he runs to another area, takes off another shoe, and tosses that at her. She catches it. This is followed by one sock, and then the other.)*

MURIEL

No! No, no, no! No stinky socks! I don't want those stinky socks!

*(Next, TOM unbuttons his shirt, slows down so that she can gain on him, and once she is in touching distance, he whips it off, flings it over her head, and moves away, again, removing his T-shirt on the way, which he flings back at MURIEL, who is just now coming out from under the shirt. Despite the fact that all of this borders on 'madness,' MURIEL is probably having more fun than she has had in years.)*

TOM

*(Hopping on the coffee table)* All right, Muriel! I warned you! You asked for it!

*(TOM reaches for his fly as MURIEL moves closer.)*

MURIEL

Take it off! Take it off!

BARBARA

Oh, my God! How far is he going to go!

TIMOTHY

With him, you never know! Tom! Stop that! Now! Get off that table!

*(TIMOTHY starts for TOM, but MURIEL inadvertently cuts him off. TOM is holding onto the tongue of the zipper as he goes into a series of grinds, in perfect time to the music.)*

TOM

On the count of 'four,' Muriel! I warn you...!

MURIEL

*(Roaring, as she continues to close in)* Take it off! Take it off!

TOM

One! Two! Three! And...

*(Suddenly, MURIEL straightens up, pushes an arm toward him as if she were stopping traffic, turns her head quickly away from him, throws her free hand over her eyes, and screams.)*

MURIEL

Stop! Stop! You win! Don't!! You win!!

TOM

*(Overlapping)* FOUR!!!

*(As TOM unzips his fly, he spins around [BACK TO AUDIENCE] and pushes his pants down to his ankles. He is wearing no shorts.)*

TIMOTHY

Tom...!!! *(Moves in rapidly; furious)* All right! That's it! What the hell are you trying to do!

MURIEL

*(Screaming with laughter and breaking away, but unable to take her eyes off him)* Oh, my God! Bare-assed!!!

*(BARBARA doubles over with laughter.)*

TOM

*(Flustered)* Hey! Wait a minute, Tim! I only did it for fun...

*(But TIMOTHY has charged to him and yanked him off the table causing him to literally fall into his arms.)*

TIMOTHY

How much attention do you need, for Christ's sake! Put those pants on!

*(TOM begins to put the pants on hurriedly.)*

MURIEL

*(Genuinely concerned that TIMOTHY might strike TOM)* Tim! Tim, it's all right. I've seen one! I really have!

TOM

*(Laughing nervously and helplessly)* When you've seen one, you've seen 'em all..??

TIMOTHY

And you shut up!

MURIEL

*(Drawing him away)* Tim, darling, please. Slow down.

TIMOTHY

I don't like seeing my clients make fools of themselves!

MURIEL

It shall never cease.

TIMOTHY

It damned well better!

MURIEL

*(Gently)* We've talked about this. They're children, Tim.

TIMOTHY

They're Cretins!

MURIEL

Come now, darling. We're all het up. Let's simmer down. The music's wrong...

TIMOTHY

The music's fine!

MURIEL

We need something sweet. *(Taking over the room)* Barbara, be a darling and put on something nice and old fashioned. And you, Thomas Brouder, zip up those pants and drink that coffee! As for you, *(To TIMOTHY)* I'm fixing you a drink! What'll it be?

TIMOTHY

Scotch. Straight up.

MURIEL

Oh, my, so butch!

TIMOTHY

Cut that out!!

TOM

*(Feeling left out; sheepishly from across the room)* Thanks for the coffee, Muriel...

BARBARA

*(To MURIEL)* How about a waltz?

MURIEL

Perfect! *(Handing a drink to TIMOTHY)* Here.

TIMOTHY

Thanks.

MURIEL

Now, then! How is everybody! *(No response)* Take two. How is everybody!

*(All ad lib responses and the mood lightens as a beautiful Viennese waltz comes up.)*

MURIEL

That's better. *(Turning to TIMOTHY)* Timothy. Will you do me the honor?

TIMOTHY

I wouldn't consider it.

MURIEL

You owe me one.

TIMOTHY

Later.

MURIEL

Now!

TIMOTHY

So why not? It's the one dance I can handle.

MURIEL

*(A warm smile)* I remembered.

*(TIMOTHY leads her out into the room, and they take quite a formal position, waiting for just the right upbeat.)*

MURIEL

Ooooooopp! Wait! Wait, wait, wait! Can't dance without my shoes!

BARBARA

You just did.

MURIEL

You call that dancing! You ain't seen nothin' yet! (*Looking for her shoes*) I'm the only woman alive who can't dance with her shoes off. And I hate shoes! God! Sick!

(*MURIEL finds her shoes under the coffee table. She puts them on, and they begin to waltz. She dances it beautifully, and though TIMOTHY is a little stiff, he is, to say the least, diligent. All the while, TOM is getting dressed, but glances toward them, occasionally.*)

TOM

(*Passing BARBARA*) They're pretty good.

BARBARA

They're wonderful! (*Beat*) You okay...?

TOM

(*Pouting*) Sure. (*Beat*) Sure.

MURIEL

(*With abandon*) Grapevine! (*They immediately go into it*) Oh, I adore the Grapevine! My God, does this take me back!!

(*They do it, again, and it is inspired. BARBARA applauds, and they sweep off around the room once more; around and around and around.*)

MURIEL

(*Stopping suddenly*) Wait a minute! Wait a minute, Tim! (*Holding her stomach*) Oh, my God! I shouldn't have done those! I knew it! (*Pause; breathing very hard*) Oh, Jesus! I'm going to throw up! Where is it? Where is it!! I'm going to throw up...!!!

TIMOTHY

(*Pointing toward the den door*) Through there!! Go!!

(*MURIEL exits on the double, followed by TIMOTHY.*)

BARBARA

(*Pushing passed him*) I'll go with her.

TIMOTHY

You stay here. I can handle it.

BARBARA

I want to.

(*BARBARA hurries into the den, slamming the door behind her, right in TIMOTHY's face. He is momentarily stunned.*)

TIMOTHY

I guess she wants to.

*(He turns. TOM is looking at him. And TOM is pathetic; a little boy lost; looking very sad, and feeling very bad. TIMOTHY only looks at him for a moment, then goes to the tape deck and turns the music off.)*

TOM

*(It is difficult for him to speak)* I went too far, again, didn't I?

TIMOTHY

Yes, you did.

TOM

I'm really sorry.

TIMOTHY

You should be.

TOM

You're not being as...understanding...as usual.

TIMOTHY

There's a limit to understanding, Tom. And patience.

TOM

And I just...uh...pushed you to your limit, huh...?

TIMOTHY

Yes. You did.

TOM

*(Pause)* I'm really sorry.

TIMOTHY

That's getting pretty old.

TOM

Gee. I was just having fun. And these days, you know people aren't as uptight about those things...

TIMOTHY

You were after her balls!

TOM

Wha...? You don't talk like that...!

TIMOTHY

*(With contained fury)* This is my home, Tom! I was conducting business! Here! For you! I was starting you on a whole new career...and you shot it down! Well, I'm not really sure how long I can sit around and watch you self-destruct! I'm not really sure how long I can do that!

TOM

Are you talking about the drinking, or the stripping...?

TIMOTHY

That, too.

TOM

And...?

TIMOTHY

Barbara.

TOM

Oh. *(Beat)* Those two are a thing, then, huh...?

TIMOTHY

You know damned well they are.

TOM

And I came on to strong.

TIMOTHY

You had help.

*(BARBARA enters)*

BARBARA

Excuse me, Tim. Could I get some salt?

TIMOTHY

Sure. In the cabinet to the left of the sink.

BARBARA *(O.S.)*

*(Exiting into the kitchen)* And a glass for warm water. She's just...dry heaving. Nothing's happening.

*(BARBARA exits. TOM and TIMOTHY say nothing.)*

TOM

*(Finally; softly)* I'm sorry Muriel got sick.

*(TIMOTHY doesn't respond. BARBARA, carrying a box of salt and an empty glass, comes through the room without speaking and goes back into the den, closing the door after her. Another long silence; TIMOTHY breaks it this time. It is very painful for him. He sighs deeply and speaks quietly, wishing he could actually mean what he is saying.)*

TIMOTHY

You have to understand something, Tom. We don't really need you. I like you. I love you in a way. Madge loves you. But we don't need you. We had a good life before you came along, and if necessary, we'll have a good life after you're gone.

TOM

*(Becoming frightened)* Where am I...going...?

TIMOTHY

Out into the world all by yourself, unless we clear some things up. Right now.

TOM

*(Hoping to lighten the mood)* Aren't I a little young to be pushed out of the nest...?

TIMOTHY

I'm being serious, Tom. You may want to join me.

TOM

...okay...

TIMOTHY

None of it's new. We've been through it all. Many times. But no more. This is it. It 'takes' tonight...right now ...or you're out.

TOM

...out...?

TIMOTHY

No more indulging by me. No more testing by you.

*(There are tears in his eyes. He is remorseful, and very moved by TIM's obvious affection for him.)*

TOM

You really...do...care for me, don't you?

TIMOTHY

Yes, I do.

TOM

And not just because my father told you to...?

TIMOTHY

Your father didn't tell me to. Your father asked me to help you get started.

TOM

But...I disappoint you.

TIMOTHY

Sometimes. Yes.

TOM

I disappointed him, too.

TIMOTHY

I know.

TOM

*(Hurt and angry; his father has humiliated him once again)* He told you.

TIMOTHY

*(Having difficulty expressing it)* No... *(Beat)* I just...see a pattern here, and...if you were my son...

*(TOM, who has turned away, looks back at him.)*

TOM

What...?

*(There is a long moment while they only look at one another.)*

TIMOTHY

*(The words are difficult for him)* If you were my...son...

TOM

*(Before TOM can say more)* I wish I were!

*(TOM falls into TIMOTHY's arms, pressing himself hard against his chest, wanting TIMOTHY to absorb him, to protect him from himself and the world. TIMOTHY is thrown off guard.)*

TIMOTHY

Tommy?? Hey, Tommy, wait a minute... What's the matter?

TOM

*(Pulling himself more closely into TIMOTHY)* I don't want you to be ashamed of me!

*(For just one brief moment, TIMOTHY gives into the physical contact. But the intimacy is disquieting, and trying to cover his embarrassment, he eases TOM away as gently as possible.)*

TIMOTHY

Hey. Hey, I'm not ashamed of you, son. You make me angry sometimes, yes, and there're a few things you need to work out, but I want to try to help you with them...if you'll let me...  
*(TOM looks up.)*

TOM

Thank you. *(There is a long, intimate moment between them)* Well...

*(TOM sighs, wipes his nose, then slaps TIMOTHY on a shoulder and moves toward the bar.)*

TOM, *Continued*

Shoot! Tell me what you want me to do. I'll do anything. I promise. *(Lifts the bottle of scotch)* What do you want me to do?

TIMOTHY

I'd like you to start by putting that bottle down.

*(TOM looks at him; looks at the bottle; looks back at him; makes a silly face; snaps his fingers jauntily a few times; looks back at the bottle; and puts it down.)*

TOM

Easy. *(Smugly)* Next?

TIMOTHY

*(Disturbed by the sudden change)* Sit up and bark!

TOM

What...?

TIMOTHY

You did that bottle bit like a trained dog!

TOM

I drink, you don't like it! I don't drink, you don't like it! Can't I do anything right?

TIMOTHY

What the hell is this? We made honest-to-God contact back there! What are you doing!

TOM

*(Frustrated)* I don't know! I'm sorry! *(Angrily)* Goddamnit! I keep saying that! *(Controlled, again)* But I keep having to. *(Beat)* You're right. I shouldn't drink. *(Pushing the bottle away)* So that's that. Next?

TIMOTHY

Pull back on Barbara. For tonight. I know you two are going to do what you want to do. Tomorrow, next week, next month, get together and ball your brains out if that's what you have on your minds. But not tonight!

TOM

Well...I hadn't exactly planned to do it tonight!

TIMOTHY

You don't plan a lot of the things you do.

TOM

You don't like Barbara very much, do you?

TIMOTHY

Just pull back.

TOM

It's a promise. Next?

TIMOTHY

That's it. Tomorrow we'll get together. I'll set some ground rules. You'll abide by them. And one day, you may even allow that break you've been waiting for to settle in on you.

TOM

*(It is almost childlike)* You really believe I can...?

TIMOTHY

It's up to you.

*(The den door opens suddenly. BARBARA comes through it, gagging violently. MURIEL can be heard throwing up in the background.)*

BARBARA

*(Through the gagging)* It worked. I'm sorry, Tim... I can't stay in there!

TIMOTHY

That's all right! I'll handle it!

*(He hurries past her, closing the door behind him. BARBARA continues to gag, while TOM just looks at her, horrified, beginning to gag himself.)*

TOM

Don't do that, please. Not in here. It's the living room! Don't! Please! Breathe deep. Real deep! Real deep!

BARBARA

*(Wiping away the tears that are streaming as a result of the near-retching)* Do you believe it? I used to want to be a nurse! It's just as well I turned to television. Could I have a little wine, please?

TOM

Sure. Muriel having a rough time?

BARBARA

Awful. She is so sick!

TOM

Well, I always say, it's not what you drink; it's how many.

BARBARA

You say that??

TOM

*(Laughing as he hands her the wine)* Here you are.

BARBARA

*(Taking it)* Thanks.

TOM

*(Pouring himself a glass of wine)* To Muriel, Nurses and Television Ladies.

BARBARA

I'll drink to all of that.

*(They clink glasses, but he puts his back on the bar without drinking.)*

BARBARA

You're not having anything?

TOM

I think I'm sated.

BARBARA

Well... Cheers!

*(She takes a sip, and wanders away. TOM watches her. She seems to sense it and turns.)*

BARBARA

Why are you staring at me?

TOM

May I ask you something?

Sure. BARBARA

What is it with you and Muriel? TOM

We're lovers. You know that. BARBARA

Do you mind if I don't believe you? TOM

(Easily) No. But that really wouldn't be my problem, would it? BARBARA

(Studying her) Are you putting me on...? TOM

(Laughing, and teasing him) Probably. I put everybody on. BARBARA

You do? TOM

Most everybody. Some, at least. BARBARA

(Going to sit beside her) Like...who...for instance? TOM

Oh... Muriel... BARBARA

You're kidding. TOM

No. BARBARA

Yes, you are. TOM

No, I'm not. BARBARA

But...why...? TOM

BARBARA

It's very simple, really. She needs to think she's brighter than I. She needs to think she's stronger than I. So I let her think it.

TOM

Is she?

BARBARA

No. But that's what she needs. And I love her.

TOM

*(Staring off)* There's something frightening about you.

BARBARA

It's the honesty. That's always frightening. Also, I'm a terribly attractive woman who happens to like women.

TOM

Jesus Christ! You're too much for me.

BARBARA

*(Pats his thigh playfully; leaves her hand there)* I doubt that.

TOM

*(Looking down at her hand, then looking up)* Wait a minute! There's something wrong here. Firstly, I'm the one who's supposed to start the hanky-panky...

BARBARA

*(Smiling; removes her hand)* Excuse me. I didn't mean that to be a come on...

TOM

*(Continuing as if she hadn't spoken)* Secondly, especially when I'm high. And thirdly, you dig women.

BARBARA

*(Easily, with no seductive intent)* I, also, dig men, as you may have noticed.

TOM

Good God! *(Strangely intimidated)* I want to back up a minute. You say you're honest, and you sure as hell seem to be, and yet, all you've just told me – about you and Muriel – about putting her on – it's just one great big lie.

BARBARA

Is it?

TOM

I think so.

BARBARA

I love her. I'm protecting her. When she's more sure of me, maybe I won't have to. Don't you know anyone who protects you that way?

TOM

I hope not.

BARBARA

So strong. So independent.

TOM

I hope so.

BARBARA

I'm sorry.

TOM

Why?

BARBARA

Because you don't even know about Tim.

TOM

What about Tim?

BARBARA

He protects you. Or tries to.

TOM

Oh. *(Beat)* Yeah. *(Beat; an unguarded, thoughtful smile)* Okay. Tim's special.

BARBARA

To you...very...

TOM

*(Defensively)* So...?

BARBARA

*(Gently)* It's nothing to be ashamed of.

TOM

I know that. Are you picking a fight?

BARBARA

I don't mean to be.

TOM

Then you're trying to prove something.

BARBARA

No.

TOM

*(Spelling it out)* I love Tim. I don't have a 'sneaker' for him.

BARBARA

A sneaker...?

TOM

I don't want to go to bed with him. All right?

BARBARA

*(Easily)* All right.

TOM

All right! *(Long pause; chuckles)* We're sounding like Muriel and me. *(Beat; another chuckle)* We're funny.

BARBARA

It's our birthright...being people, and all...

TOM

Yeah. *(Pause; becoming increasingly excited by her, he tries to pull back)* Let's talk about something else. How's your wine?

BARBARA

I'm content.

TOM

I'm not. I'm a wreck.

BARBARA

Why don't you have a drink, then?

TOM

*(After an intense inner struggle)* ...I think I will...

*(They smile at each other. He doesn't move. Just then, TIMOTHY comes from the den. TOM quickly breaks their gaze.)*

TIMOTHY

*(Speaking as he moves toward the kitchen)* She missed.

TOM

She what!

TIMOTHY

Well...she did and she didn't.

BARBARA

How's that possible?

TIMOTHY

You had to be there. *(Exits to kitchen)*

BARBARA

I feel so bad about that.

TOM

Don't. Believe me, there's no one in the world better with a drunk than that guy. And I know. First hand.

BARBARA

*(Smiling)* I believe you.

TOM

Yeah... *(Looking at BARBARA; squirms, glances away)* God, I feel so fucking awkward. *(Pause, then back to BARBARA)* This is not my usual style, Barbara!

BARBARA

*(Smiling)* I'm sure.

TOM

But... *(Having a helluva time getting it out)* ...I've been wanting to be alone with you all night. I mean, really alone, and now...I'm nervous.

*(BARBARA laughs easily. TIMOTHY comes from the kitchen carrying a roll of paper towels, a container of Fantastik, and a can of Lysol spray. He crosses the room and exits into the den, closing the door after him. TOM waits until he is gone, then, feeling uncomfortable with the situation, he moves to the bar, picks up his glass of wine and takes a sip.)*

TOM, *Continued*

When I come back over there, could we just...sit and...talk ...quietly...for a little while...?

BARBARA

*(A lovely smile)* I wouldn't have it any other way.

TOM

*(Perplexed, and little disappointed)* You wouldn't...?

BARBARA

Should I?

TOM

I don't know. I mean...all night...

BARBARA

*(Continuing for him)* ...we've been flirting with each other. I know. I can't seem to help myself. *(A warm, natural laugh)* Muriel hates it. But I don't mean any harm by it.

TOM

Then you were just...teasing..?

BARBARA

Oh, no. I'm very attracted to you. And I know you are to me. But I think, tonight, we might have gone a little far. I think Timothy may be unhappy with us.

TOM

*(Blustering)* Awww, no, hell, he hasn't even noticed!

BARBARA

Regardless, there's a time and a place for everything. And I do apologize if I've misled you.

TOM

*(Studying her)* I'm still not so sure you have.

BARBARA

*(A throwaway; without the slightest hint of a tease)* We'll see. *(TOM just looks at her, bemused.)* Is something wrong?

TOM

*(Beat; breaks into a boyish grin)* By God, I like you! I mean, I really like you! You're confusing the hell out of me but...

BARBARA

*(Cutting him off)* I like you, too.

*(This is followed by a long silence.)*

TOM

*(Quietly)* Barbara?

BARBARA

Yes?

TOM

I'm trying to put some things together, and I hope this isn't out of line, but...

BARBARA

*(Overlapping)* I'm sure it won't be.

TOM

*(Continuing)* ...may I see you, again?

*(TIMOTHY appears from the den, carrying his supplies. He closes the door quietly. TOM quickly hides his drink.)*

TIMOTHY

*(Dryly)* In case you've never tried it, Fantastik works.

BARBARA

*(Laughing)* Is she all right?

TIMOTHY

Fine. Shoes off. Blouse loosened. Cold cloth on throat. And oblivion.

BARBARA

I wish that hadn't happened.

TIMOTHY

It's routine. Doesn't happen often, but often enough for us to remember what to do the next time. Anybody hungry?

BARBARA

*(Surprised)* Hungry?? No. I don't think so.

TIMOTHY

Tom?

TOM

I can always eat.

TIMOTHY

Right. How about eggs. Scrambled.

TOM

Great!

TIMOTHY

I'll call you when they're ready.

BARBARA

*(Starting to get up)* Let me help you.

No, thanks. (*Exits to kitchen*)

TIMOTHY

He's a nice man.

BARBARA

Yes, he is. (*Beat*) May I?

TOM

See me, again? Yes.

BARBARA

When's your next free night?

TOM

Tomorrow.

BARBARA

Oh. That doesn't give me much time to chicken out, does it?

TOM

No. Nor I.

BARBARA

(*Pause*) Tomorrow night?

TOM

Fine.

BARBARA

(*Pause*) Will...Muriel...?

TOM

Find out? Oh, no. I could never do that to her.

BARBARA

Then...how do we pull this off?

TOM

I'm up every morning at 5:30, so I go to bed early when I can. And when I do, I turn my phone off. Muriel understands that.

BARBARA

Good. Where shall we go, then?

TOM

BARBARA

Under the circumstances, we probably shouldn't...go...anywhere. *(Beat)* Why don't you just come to my place?

TOM

Fine...

BARBARA

Fine.

*(They are just looking at each other. The implications of her last remarks and the look in her eyes are having a powerful effect on TOM. He reaches for her, takes her chin in one hand and begins to move toward her very slowly.)*

TOM

I'm going to have to kiss you, now.

BARBARA

*(Tensing, and removing his hand)* Oh, no, you don't. There's a time and a place. Remember?

TOM

I have to.

BARBARA

*(Firmly)* Tom. No. We'll see each other tomorrow night.

TOM

What are you afraid of?!

BARBARA

Me! I can be a very controlled woman. I can, also, be a very passionate one. I know my limits. You may be one of them.

TOM

That's good news.

BARBARA

*(Fighting for her equilibrium)* And I will not do anything to upset Muriel. Not here...

TOM

I'm sorry, Barbara. But I have to kiss you, now.

BARBARA

*(Aching for the embrace, while wanting to deny it)* Tom, no...!

*(TOM won't be stopped. The kiss is brief. BARBARA struggles throughout. When they break, TOM is shaking.)*

TOM

Oh, God, Barbara!

*(He starts to pull her to him, again.)*

BARBARA

*(Beginning to panic)* Tom, no, please! Not here. I want it, too, but not here, please! Muriel's in there...!

*(TOM persists as he licks her neck, nibbles an ear, fondles a breast. BARBARA is rapidly giving into her feelings.)*

BARBARA, *Continued*

Oh, God, Tom, no! Please, please, not here...! Don't do this. Don't Tom... Oh, Jesus.....!

*(BARBARA gives herself completely to the embrace as TOM pushes her back onto the sofa and crawls on top of her. For now, for them, no one else exists in the world. The den door opens very slowly and deliberately, and MURIEL, blinking and not quite conscious yet, comes carefully and with labored concentration into the room. Her one thought is to present herself with as much dignity as possible, so her preoccupation is with getting one last strand of hair into its proper place. Once accomplished, she turns to face the world, a sweet and very 'together' smile on her face. But before she can utter a sound, she becomes aware of, and then sees, TOM and BARBARA on the sofa. For a moment, there is no response. She simply looks. And looks. She is devastated. But then, anger begins to well up in her. As it is building, she walks slowly and quietly around the far end of the sofa, never taking her eyes off the couple. Soon, she is standing over them, and in front of them. She is no longer a lost, frightened child. She is a giant, and a raging one. Suddenly, though the voice is soft, it is seething, and resounds through the room.)*

MURIEL

YOU GODDAMNED SONOFABITCH!!!

**This is Not the End of the Play**  
**Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes**