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Product Code A0530-F

The Fainting Couch

A psycho-sexual drama

by

Jill Elaine Hughes

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The Fainting Couch

by Jill Elaine Hughes

CHARACTERS

JULIA: *A young depressed woman, late 20s, without adequate health insurance seeking psychiatric help*

DR. NUKULYE (pronounced Noo-kyoo-lah-ee): *An Anglo-Kenyan psychiatry resident*

THE LOVER: *A Lover's Everyman who exists mostly in Julia's memory and subconscious*

SETTING:

An office of psychiatry at a Chicago university hospital and other various locations

TIME:

The present

ETC:

Developed in part at **Breadline Theatre Group** Playwriting Workshop 2000 (Public staged reading of select scenes)

Developed in part at **Chicago Dramatists** (Dramaturgy; 2000-2002)

Developed in part at 2001 **Women's Theatre Alliance** New Plays Development Workshop (Dramaturgy; one public staged reading)

***Staged reading at **Chicago Writers Bloc New Plays Festival**, Oct 13, 2004

The Fainting Couch by Jill Elaine Hughes

ACT I: SCENE 1

AT RISE: Spotlight on JULIA

JULIA

It was January and I was feeling generally like crap, which has been my usual state of mind since I was at least fifteen, but it's kind of been in varying *levels* of crap, you know? This wasn't just the winter blues—this was a crap explosion. Not even a *crap* explosion—a *runny shit* explosion. I think I can say that. You see, for me there has always been this basic level of crapness sort of hanging over the top of my head – you know, not too heavy, but still noticeable – which has been there for so long that I've just gotten used to it. Like when the muffler on your car just starts rattling and rattling, and you keep meaning to go to Midas to get it fixed, but you don't, and you start getting so used to the rattling that it just becomes part of the normal sound of your car—it becomes so natural to you that it begins to reassure you that your car can just keep on running with this new and interesting noise underlying its normal function, and you forget that anything is wrong until your whole exhaust system suddenly falls out of your car and your entire underbody is just lying in the middle of the fucking Kennedy Expressway. Only then do you realize that the goddamn car isn't going to run anymore without that rattling rusty muffler that you had grown so attached to, and you just panic. I mean really panic. Like waking up in the middle of the night gasping for breath, thinking the world is going to end because your sinuses are so clogged up by your constantly running tears. Now, I can deal with feeling like basic-level crap all the time. That's just the way it's always been. But when I can't breathe at all, and I'm turning blue and using up an entire box of Kleenex every night between the hours of three and four A.M., then I think it's time to get a tune-up. So here I am.

I'm poor and have almost no insurance. The doctor needs his license—I guess it'll work out.

SPOTLIGHT OUT.

ACT I: SCENE 2

AT RISE: DR. NUKULYE's psychiatrist office. Enter DR. NUKULYE. He goes to his chair and begins reading JULIA's file. JULIA walks to his couch and lies down; THE LOVER follows her and stands behind the couch.

DR. NUKULYE

Hello Julia. I'm Dr. Nukulye. It's nice to meet you.

JULIA

Hi.

DR. NUKULYE

Were you able to look over my credentials profile? I hope they proved satisfactory for you.

JULIA

Um, yeah—it said something about how you went to the Royal College of Surgeons in London, that you're originally from Kenya—blahblahblah.

DR. NUKULYE

That is correct.

JULIA

Didn't you like Kenya?

DR. NUKULYE

What do you mean?

JULIA

Did you not like living there?

DR. NUKULYE

I love my homeland. But I'm afraid it has limited possibilities for psychiatrists.

JULIA

Oh. Well. I guess you're right. I've always wanted to go there. You know, on safari or something.

DR. NUKULYE

Safari? Oh yes—of course. I grew up in downtown Nairobi—a bit removed from the safari companies. But they are popular.

JULIA

Yeah, my dad took one for his honeymoon with his fourth wife.

DR. NUKULYE

Did he enjoy it?

JULIA

I don't know. I haven't talked to him in three years.

DR. NUKULYE

I see.

JULIA

So, like, um, what part of Kenya do your people come from?

DR. NUKULYE

What do you mean?

JULIA

Well, you sound like you're from England, but—

DR. NUKULYE

But I don't look like I'm from England. Quite right. Well, my mother's side of the family was of the Masai tribe, and my father's of the Kikuyu tribe. My mother left her people to marry my father in Nairobi. My mother was a teacher and my father was a government official. Under the British and after independence, in fact—

JULIA

Wow. Well, that's interesting. Why are you here in the States? You went from Kenya, to England, to here. Why?

DR. NUKULYE

Well, I have always been a bit restless. I couldn't pursue my chosen career the way I liked at home, so I went abroad. But we're not here to talk about me, Julia. We're here to talk about you. I see from your Intake file that you have had problems with depression on and off for a number of years.

JULIA

Yes, that's right.

DR. NUKULYE

Are you familiar with the Free Psychiatry Residents' Training Program?

JULIA

Some. The receptionist went over it with me a little bit, but—

DR. NUKULYE

Well, why don't I go over it with you again?

JULIA

Okay.

DR. NUKULYE

I've almost completed my residency. I am a fully accredited medical doctor—but before I can be licensed to fully practice psychiatry, dispense psychoactive drugs and so on in the United States, I must complete a six-month therapeutic session with a severely affected individual—

JULIA

I'm "severely affected?"

DR. NUKULYE

Well, yes, that's why you're here. (*JULIA looks put off*) The licensing regulations are much more restrictive here in the U.S. than they are in the U.K. I'm already licensed to practice in the U.K.—I even worked there for a while. I just thought I'd prefer to work here in the United States.

JULIA

Oh.

DR. NUKULYE

Once I've completed three months of our sessions – we'll meet three times a week – I'll begin writing up my case study on you, provided you agree to the conditions on this waiver. It will be reviewed by the attending faculty physician, and published eventually. Your name will never be used, however, so that patient confidentiality will be maintained. Would you agree to that?

JULIA

I'll agree to anything that makes me feel better.

DR. NUKULYE

Good. Just sign here, then.

DR. NUKULYE hands her the waiver; she signs it with some hesitation.

DR. NUKULYE, *Continued*

I also see that you expressed in your Intake interview that you have had a number of dysfunctional relationships with men? Is that correct?

JULIA

Uh-huh.

DR. NUKULYE

Why don't you tell me a little bit about that?

JULIA

Well, I wouldn't even know where to start...

DR. NUKULYE

Start anywhere you like.

JULIA

Well, I guess it started when I was a kid. I was never really what you would call a very popular girl in school. It was especially bad with the boys.

DR. NUKULYE

How so?

JULIA

Well, when I was little, I wasn't very pretty or anything. Not like I am now, at least. Now I'm *too* pretty. But we were discussing me as a kid. Anyway, I had really, really long hair. My mom wouldn't let me cut it. I got to be ten years old and I'd never had a haircut. My mom was basically living her sexual hair fantasy vicariously through me, you know?

DR. NUKULYE

And the boys at school—wait. I don't see the connection between your hair and the boys at school.

JULIA

Well, yeah it was like this—no. I guess I'm rambling. Let me just start all over. I'll start out with my brother. My schizophrenic older brother, who used to have hallucinations in class...

THE LOVER alternatively mock hallucinates and jabs JULIA like a playful sibling.

DR. NUKULYE

Your older brother is schizophrenic? Fascinating. Schizophrenia is a particular interest of mine. (*Writes something on his pad*) When did—when did he become schizophrenic?

JULIA

Oh, he's always been schizophrenic. Anyway, he used to have these *episodes* in school. . .

DR. NUKULYE

Can you elaborate on his episodes?

JULIA rises to face THE LOVER; assumes a child's voice.

JULIA

Todd, what are you doing? Mom said we had to stay after school today until she comes to pick us up—. What have you got smeared all over your face? Mom is gonna be *sooooo* mad. . .

THE LOVER

Julia, today in history class I saw the Green Spider Man come out of the cloakroom and...and...he ate all my crayons.

JULIA

Green Spider Man? You ate those crayons all by yourself. I'm telling!

THE LOVER

Only 'cause the Green Spider Man told me to! And he said that if I didn't, he would kill me.

DR. NUKULYE

So this bothered you.

JULIA

Yeah. My whole family was abnormal, but Todd was by far the worst. But anyway, we were talking about *my* childhood. . .

DR. NUKULYE

Can you elaborate some more on your brother's episodes?

JULIA

Why?

DR. NUKULYE

It sounds very intriguing.

JULIA

I don't want to.

DR. NUKULYE

I think you should.

JULIA

Look, I'm not here to talk about how messed up my brother is. I'm here to talk about how messed up *I* am.

THE LOVER returns to a neutral stance.

DR. NUKULYE

Does discussing your brother make you angry?

JULIA

It does when the person I'm here to talk about my problems with is more interested in my brother than in me. I really do want to participate in this program, but I was kind of hoping that we could focus on *my* problems.

DR. NUKULYE

I assure you, Julia, that I was asking about your brother with your interests in mind. Family history is always important to making a diagnosis, especially with schizophrenia. As I said, I'm rather an expert on schizophrenia...

JULIA

Yeah, you said that already. Jesus Christ. (*Mood change*) Okay, sorry. I guess I'm just nervous—I'm really, really sorry.

DR. NUKULYE

Quite all right. So you don't want to discuss your brother right now?

JULIA

No. I want to discuss why everybody hated me when I was little.

DR. NUKULYE

Because of your brother.

JULIA

Yes.

DR. NUKULYE

I see. Go on.

JULIA

As I was saying, my brother used to have these weird episodes all the time. (*THE LOVER sits down, bored*) Everybody thought we were some kind of evil hallucinating twins.

DR. NUKULYE

But nobody bothered to get to know you, did they?

JULIA

No. Everybody assumed I was just as screwed up as him.

DR. NUKULYE

Were you?

JULIA

No. At least, not at first. I was normal until everybody started beating me up.

DR. NUKULYE

Who beat you up?

JULIA

Everybody.

DR. NUKULYE

Who's "everybody"?

JULIA

Everybody. I mean, the kids at school, my so-called best friend from down the street, teachers, my dad.

DR. NUKULYE

Your dad beat you up?

JULIA

Sure. But he was, you know, my dad. It was normal. He was just trying to discipline us.

DR. NUKULYE

Discipline you and your brother.

JULIA

Yeah.

DR. NUKULYE

Hmm. Are you sure he was just disciplining you?

JULIA

Well, you know, whatever. It was just you know, using a belt on us when we were bad.

DR. NUKULYE

A belt?

JULIA

Yeah, or sometimes a cord from his workshop. But everybody did that in our family. It's just a Catholic thing. And he always apologized, after.

DR. NUKULYE

I see.

JULIA

Anyway, it was different at school. They—

DR. NUKULYE

You still haven't said who "they" are yet. And let's talk a bit more about your father beating you up. I think that may be a bit more important than your school chums.

JULIA

I'm not trying to hide anything from you, you know. I've been in therapy on and off since I was fourteen.

DR. NUKULYE

I'm sensing that you have some hostility towards me.

JULIA

Well, I guess, maybe. I'm sorry if it comes off that way. I have hostility to just about everyone right now.

DR. NUKULYE

Why?

JULIA

Because...because I guess...I don't know.

DR. NUKULYE

Well, hopefully in our time together we'll find that out. I think perhaps you have a lot of hostility toward men in general, dating back to your father.

JULIA

Um, I haven't talked about my father with you yet.

DR. NUKULYE

Yes you have. You did just now.

JULIA

I did?

DR. NUKULYE

Yes, when you were discussing the beatings.

JULIA

Oh. I guess I did.

DR. NUKULYE

Yes, of course. Why don't we pick up with your school chums? How did the boys act towards you?

JULIA

The boys were the worst.

THE LOVER jumps onto the couch with JULIA, like a child, and leads her downstage as if to play.

DR. NUKULYE

Really? How?

JULIA

I got to be in the fourth and fifth grade, right? When kids are supposed to begin to be interested in each other, you know, not sexually, but sort of...pre-sexually. The boys—well, two boys in particular. They would...tease me.

DR. NUKULYE

How would they tease you?

JULIA

They would say things to me about how I looked and how I acted.

DR. NUKULYE

Like what?

THE LOVER

You know what, Julia? You know what? You are *so* ugly that if a soldier . . .guy saw you he'd think you were such a gross monster that he'd try to like, um, pump you full of bullets, but he wouldn't be able to do it, because his um. . .his bazooka would take one look at you and run away screaming.

DR. NUKULYE

What else did they do?

JULIA looks over at THE LOVER.

THE LOVER

Oh my GOD!! You guys, here comes Julia!! Ewww, she's so gross. We gotta get out of here! We can't sit here for lunch! Oh no, Julia, please don't come over here! Please don't sit down here! Oh, MAN! We've all gotta leave now! The whole table's CONTAMINATED!! Everybody throw out the rest of your lunches! They're contaminated, too! Gross!!

DR. NUKULYE

So, how did that make you feel?

JULIA

How would it make you feel?

DR. NUKULYE

Well, to a child, it is very important to be accepted by one's peers. It seems that your peers—well, boys, anyway-- did not or could not accept you for some reason, and this was their way of telling you so.

JULIA

Mom always said that the boys treated me like that because they liked me, but I know it wasn't true.

DR. NUKULYE

Well, in some cases that can be true, but in your case it doesn't seem to be. (*JULIA looks hurt*) It wasn't meant as an insult. So you were basically being rejected by these young boys, and they in turn compelled everyone else to reject you as well?

JULIA

If you want to put it in those terms, yeah. (*Glances at THE LOVER*)

DR. NUKULYE

It sounds like school became very traumatic for you as a result. Didn't your teachers do anything to stop it?

JULIA

I tried to get help from my teachers, but they always either told me "not to be such a tattletale" or that "I needed to have a better sense of humor about myself."

THE LOVER

Yeah, Bazooka Girl! You should have a sense of humor about yourself!

DR. NUKULYE

So the adults who were supposed to be there to protect you were essentially rejecting you, too?

JULIA

Yes, that's right.

DR. NUKULYE

That must have been very difficult for you.

THE LOVER

Yeah, you're so stupid, Julia, that going to the bathroom's difficult for you!! Bazooka Girl don't even know how to pee!! She contaminates the whole lunch table with her pee!

THE LOVER Laughs; JULIA looks noticeably hurt.

DR. NUKULYE

I recall from reading your Intake file that your father left home when you were about ten years old. You went to live with him and his new wife a few years later when your mother became ill. Is that right?

JULIA

Yeah.

DR. NUKULYE

So your father abandoned you and your family at about the same time that all your school peers and teachers were rejecting and isolating you.

JULIA

(Near tears) Yes.

DR. NUKULYE

How did that make you feel?

JULIA

Pretty much like shit.

DR. NUKULYE

Indubitably. Yes. Well, I think that's about all the time we have for today. I must say, a fascinating session, Julia. Lots of things for us to work on together. See you Wednesday?

JULIA

Okay.

LIGHTS OUT.

ACT I: SCENE 3

AT RISE: Spot on JULIA.

JULIA

I'd rather have a woman therapist, but—at least this guy has a gentle voice. Soothing. Maybe it's the accent, I don't know. Kind of like the soft-spoken newscaster on NPR, the one who comes on at 11 just before I go to sleep. He has a voice as smooth as a chocolate mousse. I could say anything to that voice. I could fall asleep to it. Just float back with it onto the soft velvet of one of those old chaise lounges, you know like you see in those old movies. My grandmother had one, sort of a half-couch, half-bed thing. It was red plush with a golden fringe. She said it was from back in the olden days, for fainting on. When women fainted a lot, you know, because of their corsets, and all the arsenic-laced tonics they would drink to make their skin pale. It was so, so soft. Deep red plush that felt like a baby's thigh. It would just swallow you whole.

ACT I: SCENE 4

AT RISE: JULIA and THE LOVER are center stage. JULIA is curled up on the floor as if she has just awakened from sleep.

JULIA

What are you doing here?

THE LOVER

I'm here to make sure you don't get up.

JULIA

I don't want to stay in bed. I have places to be today.

THE LOVER

Nope.

JULIA

But I have to!

THE LOVER

Nope. Don't think so.

JULIA

I really don't see why you have to do this to me every day.

THE LOVER

Just doing my job.

JULIA

Do you have any idea how bad this makes me feel?

THE LOVER

Yeah.

JULIA

No, I don't think you do.

THE LOVER

Sure I do. I know what my own job description is.

JULIA

To make me miserable.

THE LOVER

Pretty much. Although I don't do it all by myself. You actually do most of my job for me.

JULIA

Yeah, right.

THE LOVER

No, really. You're pretty good at messing up your own life. Hardly need any help from me at all.

JULIA

That's a cheap shot.

THE LOVER

You're the reason I'm here at all. You keep choosing to have me around. So I stay. Can't make a man leave when he's invited to be there in the first place.

JULIA

You're really starting to get on my nerves.

THE LOVER

What are you gonna do about it?

JULIA

I'm getting up. I'm getting out of bed. For once you've driven me to it.

ACT I: SCENE 5

AT RISE: JULIA goes to DR. NUKULYE's couch and lies down.

DR. NUKULYE

You're back.

JULIA

You sound surprised. Why wouldn't I be back?

DR. NUKULYE

Oh, sometimes the people who participate in our free program don't come back after their first session. That's happened to me a couple of times before.

JULIA

Well, *I'm* back.

DR. NUKULYE

That's good.

JULIA

I'm a little too messed up to be skipping free therapy sessions, after all. (*Laughs uneasily*)

DR. NUKULYE

You've obviously had a lot of therapy. Based on your past experiences, what are your reactions to our first session?

JULIA

Oh, I don't know. It pretty much seemed like all the other "first sessions" I've had before.

DR. NUKULYE

I see. Well. Why don't we just pick up where we left off, with your father?

JULIA

We didn't leave off with my father.

DR. NUKULYE

Well, why don't we just start out with him then. What is your father like?

JULIA

He's a schmuck.

DR. NUKULYE

Can you elaborate on that?

JULIA

He's a womanizer, a liar, a leaver. He's also very smart. And he always expects everyone to give him everything, while he gives nothing in return. If you ask him to give you something back after you've used yourself up trying to please him, he goes ballistic. He's been married four times, has four sets of kids. I'm from the first set.

DR. NUKULYE

So your father is a narcissist.

JULIA

Narcissist, egomaniac—you name it, he's one of them.

DR. NUKULYE

Do you love him?

JULIA

Yes. Of course.

DR. NUKULYE

So you love your father despite all of his faults.

JULIA

He's my dad. I'm stuck with him and his DNA, and I can't change that. I've already been through all of this in therapy before. "Let go of your hate and resentment for your father, because you cannot change him," blah blah blah. Been there, done that.

DR. NUKULYE

I see. So you don't think discussing your father is productive?

JULIA

Not necessarily. Unless you can tell me something I haven't heard already. Then maybe I will.

DR. NUKULYE

Well, we can start out with something else today, if that's what you'd like. But I just have one question to ask.

JULIA

Okay.

DR. NUKULYE

If you're not here to talk about your father, then why are you here? Since it seems all your problems can be traced back to him.

JULIA

Isn't a little early for you to be making those kinds of conclusions? I mean, most of my other therapists took months to figure that out.

DR. NUKULYE

Perhaps. I'll tell you what. Just tell me, in your own words, why you think you're here.

JULIA

Because I'm depressed. Well, I've always been kind of depressed, but recently it's been more than usual.

DR. NUKULYE

Why more than usual? Because it was more sadness than you'd become accustomed to?

JULIA

Well, yeah.

DR. NUKULYE

How sad are you, usually?

JULIA

What do you mean?

DR. NUKULYE

What kinds of symptoms do you have on a regular basis? When you're in your normal state of depression—not the “advanced” state that brought you here. Do you cry a lot? Do you have feelings of self-loathing?

JULIA

Yes. All of those things. But I have a way of getting around them, most of the time.

DR. NUKULYE

What do you do?

JULIA

If I keep my mind occupied, then there isn't any time for all the assorted crap to creep in and cloud everything over and make me feel bad. Well—I guess I should rephrase that. I feel bad *all* the time, but it isn't often that I feel totally nonfunctional.

DR. NUKULYE

Do you feel totally nonfunctional now?

JULIA

Well, let's see. I can't eat, I can't sleep, I cry at least four hours a day, usually more. I throw up all the time because my outlook on life literally makes me sick. I spend a lot of time lying in bed, trying to come up with reasons to get up, but I almost never do. I'm developing ulcers—I'd say that's pretty nonfunctional. And my usual coping methods just haven't been working for me lately.

DR. NUKULYE

What do you do to cope?

JULIA

A lot of things.

DR. NUKULYE

What kinds of things?

JULIA

Well, I read. I exercise. I write a little bit. Creative writing—not the copyediting stuff I usually do. I've never even shown it to anybody. And I...I go out.

DR. NUKULYE

Where do you go when you go out?

JULIA

Oh, anywhere, really. Coffeehouses. To bars and clubs, too.

DR. NUKULYE

What do you do at the bars and clubs?

JULIA

I don't know. Dance, drink—you know, the usual stuff.

DR. NUKULYE

Is this where you go to meet men? It seems that's the thing to do here in the States. Am I right?

JULIA

Yeah, I meet guys that way, sometimes. But that's not the main way I've met guys.

DR. NUKULYE

How do you usually meet men?

JULIA

(Laughs) Well, that can be a long and complicated story.

DR. NUKULYE

Aren't they all? Why don't you try telling it to me?

JULIA

Okay. I've met men so many ways. On the street. At the gym. At bars. Oh—and personal ads. I've done the personals a lot.

DR. NUKULYE

Really? Fascinating concept, the personals. They don't exist in Kenya, of course. And nobody does the personals in London unless they are sado-masochists.

JULIA

I am not a sado-masochist.

DR. NUKULYE

Well, we can discuss that at a later time. Why don't you tell me a little bit about the kinds of men you met with each of these various...methods. Did any long-term relationships develop from them?

JULIA

No. Well, there were relationships, but none of them were long-term.

DR. NUKULYE

What kind of relationships were they?

JULIA

Short-term relationships. A few...medium-term ones. But no long-term ones. I thought that would be obvious to you by now.

DR. NUKULYE

Why would it be obvious to me?

JULIA

Well, *long-term relationship* generally means married, or something. Am I married? Well, am I?

DR. NUKULYE

No, you're not.

JULIA

Well, there you go.

DR. NUKULYE

That said, why don't you tell me a little about these men.

JULIA

How many of them do you want to hear about? I mean, we could be here all day.

DR. NUKULYE

I see. Well, for now, why don't you just pick one? We can talk about more later.

Enter THE LOVER strutting, in hospital attire. He goes to stand behind the couch where JULIA lay.

JULIA

Just one? Wow, that could be kind of hard—there have been so many. Let's see now. *(Pauses for a moment)* I guess I'll start off with Richard.

DR. NUKULYE

How did you meet Richard?

JULIA

It was a setup-type deal. This woman I worked with at the time knew him and asked me to go out on a date with him.

DR. NUKULYE

And did you?

JULIA

Yeah. Anyway, he was a doctor. A double-degreed doctor, actually. He had an M.D. *and* a Ph.D.

THE LOVER

(Preening) Yes, I've just completed the first year of my residency in pediatric infectious high-resistance bacterial strains of the non-flesh-eating variety. I'm Richard. You must be Julia. My friend Beth said you were beautiful, but I must say—boy, are you easy on the eyes.

JULIA

Hi Richard. Um, thanks.

DR. NUKULYE

Quite impressive.

JULIA

Yeah, I guess I was impressed at the time, too. That changed later. But anyway—we ended up meeting on this blind date thing.

THE LOVER leans over and begins caressing JULIA's cheek, and then gently embraces her.

THE LOVER

So, uh, would you like me to stay?

JULIA

(Giggling) Okay, sure. My room's back there.

THE LOVER

I like the kitchen floor better, myself.

JULIA

My roommate will hear! *(Giggles again)*

DR. NUKULYE

So I am assuming you had intercourse on your first date?

JULIA

(Breaking free of THE LOVER's arms) Are you like, judging me or something? Because I really hate being judged.

DR. NUKULYE

I'm not judging you. I'm just trying to assess the situation. Do go on.

JULIA takes THE LOVER back in her arms; he comes to sit beside her, and strokes her hair. JULIA kisses him passionately.

JULIA

Okay, as long as you're not judging me, I'll go on. So we had sex on the first date. And it was OK. *(To THE LOVER)* So, uh, have you gone out with a lot of women?

THE LOVER

A few. But nobody as hot and as smart as you are.

JULIA

Oh, I don't know about that.

THE LOVER

I do.

DR. NUKULYE

Did things work out between you?

JULIA

No. It turned out kind of badly. It got to be New Year's Eve...

THE LOVER

Hey, Julia. I know you kind of wanted to go to that New Year's dance at Navy Pier, but I'd really like you to come to this little party out in Oak Park. All my old high school buddies really want to meet you.

JULIA

Wow. Really? You want to introduce me to your childhood friends?

A TELEPHONE RINGS: JULIA is mock-primping to go out.

THE LOVER

Hello? Yeah, hi. Whoa. (*Lowers his voice*) Wow, I really wasn't expecting to hear from you... Hang on a sec. Julia, honey I gotta take this call in the other room. Excuse me. (*Exits*)

JULIA

We go to the party. It's really nice. His friends all came up to me smiling and pumping my hand and saying, "Oh we've all heard so much about you!" and all that. We go back to his place, go to bed, yada yada yada. Then when I get up the next morning, he's in the living room smoking a bong. (*THE LOVER feigns getting stoned*) He was a doctor, you know, but that didn't stop him from smoking a lot of dope.

THE LOVER

(*Stoned*) Hey, Julia, baby. Just gottatellya. I can't see you. Anymore. You know—umm—that call that I got when you were puttin' on yer face last night or whatever, that was from Jan.

JULIA

Jan?

THE LOVER

Oh, I guess I forgot to tell you 'bout her. I dated her in high school. She's married now—but we were like, sort of dating even when she was married, and even a little when I was dating you, but um—

JULIA

What?

THE LOVER

Well, she's gettin' a divorce you know, so I gotta spend all my time with her now. Sorry 'bout that—you know, life goes on. But I've got a good blend here! Laced with pure hash. Why don't you have some before I take you home? Make you feel better.

JULIA takes a hit off the bong and chokes. No response from DR. NUKULYE.

JULIA

So are you going to say anything?

DR. NUKULYE

That sounds like it was a bit tough.

JULIA

A little hard to swallow. The thing is, this happens to me all the time. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

DR. NUKULYE

Tip of the iceberg? What do you mean by that?

JULIA

It's a cliché. It means that was just the beginning.

DR. NUKULYE

I find it interesting that you describe it so clinically.

JULIA

I don't think "tip of the iceberg" is very clinical.

DR. NUKULYE

Well, perhaps not. Why don't you just tell me what happened after you took the drugs.

JULIA

You mean after he dumped me in the living room?

DR. NUKULYE

Yes. That too.

JULIA

He took me back home. Dropped me in front of my building and then just drove off. But after about a month he came crawling back to me. . . .

THE LOVER

(*Stoned*) Look, Julia. I'm really sorry about that whole Jan thing, but you know, it just didn't work out. I thought it was gonna be so great, you know—just have great sex and work off the stress of all my bacteria cultures and lab work, but after a few weeks she just got to be a hugeass bitch, and it made me want to come back to you.

DR. NUKULYE

I see. Then what happened?

JULIA

Well, I took him back. Stupid I know, but I did.

DR. NUKULYE

Whatever for?

JULIA

What else was I supposed to do?

DR. NUKULYE

You must have had other options.

JULIA

No, I don't think I did. Not at the time. I didn't know what else to do with him, so I just took him back. It pretty much went on that way for a year or so—we'd date for a while, he'd get sick of me and then go back to the adulterer lady, then he'd get sick of her and come back to me, and so on, until. . .

DR. NUKULYE

Until what?

JULIA

Until I told him to fuck off

DR. NUKULYE

How did you do that?

JULIA drags THE LOVER centerstage and shouts at him.

JULIA

You spineless cocksucking user! You can't even get over your oedipal complex enough to let go of your first high school fuck! Then I just ran out. I never saw or spoke to him again.

THE LOVER slinks offstage in humiliation.

DR. NUKULYE

So you really took a stand.

JULIA

Yes, I did.

DR. NUKULYE

How did that make you feel?

JULIA

I felt really strong. On top of the world, in fact. So I guess I thought I was sort of sexually invincible. Does that make any sense at all?

DR. NUKULYE

Certainly. Unfortunately, in individuals who struggle with depression and relationship problems on a daily basis, it often produces an unnatural high that leads to even more destructive behavior. Especially in women with a tendency towards schizophrenia. As you know, that's one of my areas of expertise...

JULIA

I'm not schizophrenic.

DR. NUKULYE

Well no, you're really more of a manic depressive.

JULIA

Then why do you keep bringing it up?

DR. NUKULYE

It's just a point of reference.

JULIA

Whatever. Okay. I started doing the bar scene and the personals in a big way. I thought that I'd had enough of men dicking me around, you know? I felt like such a stud—can a woman even be a stud? Well, you know what I mean—I thought that I could go out there just like a fratboy, fucking everything in sight for nothing but instant gratification, and still emerge unscathed.

DR. NUKULYE

Did you?

JULIA

Did I what?

DR. NUKULYE

Emerge unscathed?

JULIA

Do I have to answer that right now?

DR. NUKULYE

No, you don't, but I think it would help both you and me if you did.

JULIA

I'd rather finish telling my story first. Please?

DR. NUKULYE

That's perfectly fine.

JULIA

So I was hitting the singles scene in a big way. I went out to the bars at least once a week. I looked forward to getting the Thursday night paper so I could read the latest personal ads. I was really meeting a lot of men. More than I'd ever met before. I thought back to when I was a kid, you know, when all the boys hated me and were mean to me, and suddenly I felt important. Most of the time, nothing came of these little meetings—I would usually scare them off.

DR. NUKULYE

How?

JULIA

I don't know. Anyway, as I was saying. They didn't all come at once, but I met, and shall I say...*conquered* them in rapid succession.

THE LOVER reenters slowly in nightclub attire; as each man is described, he strikes an appropriate pose and makes flirting gestures at JULIA.

JULIA, *Continued*

There was Dack, the very attractive drummer with a band who'd just gotten a contract on EMI. We had sex twice and I went to one of his concerts, where all the women were throwing their underpants at him. There was Jason, a set carpenter at the Goodman Theatre who had great big biceps. We had sex one night during the 1999 blizzard. There was Jonah, a non-practicing lawyer who had attended and then dropped out of four graduate programs in literature because he didn't want to go work in his father's law practice. We had sex for about a month. Then he stalked me.

THE LOVER exits.

DR. NUKULYE

An interesting lot, to be sure. Can you tell me about the stalker?

JULIA

I'd rather not.

DR. NUKULYE

Why not?

JULIA

I'm not in the right frame of mind for that today.

DR. NUKULYE

Well, that's fine for now, I suppose. But let's go on. So you had intercourse with all of these men?

JULIA

Well, yes, eventually. Not all at the same time.

DR. NUKULYE

I assumed as much, of course.

JULIA

This went on for about six months. By the end of it I was pretty bored. I mean, the pattern was always the same: Go out, have a date, decide whether to bail immediately, or have sex and then cut the cord.

DR. NUKULYE

Did you find sex with these men fulfilling?

JULIA

No, not at all.

DR. NUKULYE

Why not? Were you looking for something else, perhaps?

JULIA

I don't know. Like what?

DR. NUKULYE

Sado-masochism, perhaps? You said that you met some of these men through the personals.

JULIA

I already told you that I am not into that kind of thing.

DR. NUKULYE

Homoeroticism, possibly? Could you really be looking for that? Maybe that's why you aren't getting along with men.

JULIA

Um, no.

DR. NUKULYE

Maybe you are. Maybe you are and just haven't realized it.

JULIA

Are you sure you have all the credentials you say you do?

DR. NUKULYE

Of course. Why?

JULIA

Because...because...well, that just came out of left field.

DR. NUKULYE

No, I think they were perfectly legitimate questions for me to ask.

JULIA

Maybe you're the one into S&M.

DR. NUKULYE

Attacking me isn't going to help you, Julia.

JULIA

What's going to help me when you think I've solve all my problems by becoming a whipslinging lesbian?

DR. NUKULYE

That's not what I said at all.

JULIA

Yes it was. Can I just like—can I please just say what I was going to say before you played the gay card?

DR. NUKULYE

Of course.

JULIA

Everybody always says that guys love and leave, and women pine over love that never was. That women can't ever think of sex as just sex—that it's always something more. Even if they approached it as just sex in the first place, it always changes for them at some point.

DR. NUKULYE

Was it that way for you as well?

JULIA

I thought it wouldn't be, but it was.

DR. NUKULYE

Why?

JULIA

I was trying to act just like a slimy guy who didn't give a shit. I guess I'm just not very good at it.

DR. NUKULYE

Why do you say that?

JULIA

I've never been good at that kind of thing.

DR. NUKULYE

Well, perhaps in time you will be.

LIGHTS OUT.

ACT I: SCENE 6

AT RISE: Spot on JULIA.

JULIA

I don't know what I'm getting out of therapy right now. On the one hand, I think it helps to just talk about things without any constraints on what direction you're supposed to take, or what is or is not taboo, or never worrying that someone will walk away from you if you burst into tears. But this guy is building boxes around my head. Maybe that's because he's a student, or a resident or whatever you call it—I don't know. But then again, therapy's never really helped me before. I don't even know what "good" therapy is supposed to be.

One thing that has always bothered me in my life is how people turn themselves off when they've heard all they want to hear. Like they were one-way radios, or Nielsen monitors, or something.

That makes absolutely no sense, I know. I don't know how else to explain it. It's as if my entire world operates on the principle of the commercial break. Advertisers have to buy commercial breaks to pay for the shows we like to watch, right? But these days, the commercials are better than the shows. So why watch the shows? Why not tune them out and just take the commercial money? That's what everyone has been doing to me since the very beginning, and since it's worked for so long, I guess the rest of the world is beginning to catch on.

For example.

JULIA walks over to sit at a café-style table and chair. She picks up a book to read, and a beat or two later, enter THE LOVER.

THE LOVER

Hey, blondie baby, whatcha readin'?

JULIA ignores him.

THE LOVER

I said, whatcha readin'?

JULIA

I am not your “blondie baby.”

THE LOVER

I just asked a simple question, blondie.

JULIA

My name isn't “blondie,” okay?

THE LOVER

I'm sorry. I apologize. I really do.

JULIA

Whatever. *(Returns to her book)*

THE LOVER

Ok, let's start over. Again I apologize. That was a stupid thing to say. I don't know what I was thinking. My name is Thor. Thor Stultzgbaarsenen.

JULIA

That's a really ugly name. Almost as ugly as “blondie.”

THE LOVER

I already said I was sorry for that. I guess I really pissed you off.

JULIA

Yes.

THE LOVER

I'll say it again. I'm sorry. It's just that I had this old girlfriend once—she liked being called “blondie”.

JULIA

Well, I don't. Thor.

THE LOVER

She always said it made her feel like Jayne Mansfield.

JULIA

Jayne Mansfield was decapitated, you know.

THE LOVER

What?

JULIA

Decapitated. Her head was cut off.

THE LOVER

Who would cut off Jayne Mansfield's head?

JULIA

Nobody. A flying piece of debris did it. A stray fender, or a bumper or something—I don't know exactly. There was a car accident.

THE LOVER

Goddamn. I didn't know that.

JULIA

So your old girlfriend liked feeling like she was decapitated?

THE LOVER

No, she just said she liked feeling like Jayne Mansfield.

JULIA

Doesn't sound like she had much in the self-respect department.

THE LOVER

She respected herself enough to go out with me.

JULIA

Charming. Do you even know who Jayne Mansfield was?

THE LOVER

Well, sort of—no. Who was she?

JULIA

A movie actress in the 50s and 60s. Played dumb slutty blondes. She had a tiny waist and huge breasts. Got decapitated sometime in the 60s after her career went to hell. Tragic.

THE LOVER

So she looked like you.

JULIA

Well, yeah, sort of. Except for the decapitated part.

THE LOVER

How do you know all this?

JULIA

What's to know?

THE LOVER

Well, about Jayne Mansfield and all.

JULIA

Jayne Mansfield is hardly academic.

THE LOVER

You know what I mean.

JULIA

Well, I've always been kind of an old movie buff. I went to graduate school for film history.

THE LOVER

Wow, so you have a degree and everything.

JULIA

Well, I have a degree, but not the film studies degree. I dropped out of graduate school.

THE LOVER

Why?

JULIA

It was expensive. Expensive and boring. I didn't see the need to stick around.

THE LOVER

Wow. Wow. You know, you are actually pretty interesting.

JULIA

Does that surprise you?

THE LOVER

I guess it does.

JULIA

Why?

THE LOVER

I really wasn't looking for that kind of thing when I called you "blondie."

JULIA

That's typical.

THE LOVER

Well, um, thanks for the tip on Jayne Mansfield, or whatever. What's that book you're reading again?

JULIA

It's a screenplay anthology, actually. From my Classical Hollywood Cinema class that I never finished. *(Holds up the book)*

THE LOVER

Oh well, whatever. I have to go. Tell me what you're reading some other time.

THE LOVER exits. JULIA holds up a book after him.

JULIA

Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter? Thanks for asking.

My daily relationship grind. A thing of beauty, to be sure. Hmm. Maybe to a medieval executioner. Like executions, my relationships are usually quick, sharp, and almost bloodless. If not, they're a slow, steady burning at the stake.

Like when I was flying home from Zurich.

Modest SCENE or LIGHT CHANGE to suggest the interior of a jumbo jet. Enter THE LOVER, in airline attire.

THE LOVER

Good afternoon, miss. Would you like a beverage to start off the flight?

JULIA

Double bourbon, please.

THE LOVER

I'm afraid I can't serve any alcohol until we're over international waters. How about a nice ginger ale to start you off?

JULIA

That's fine. Just bring me a double bourbon--no, make that a *bottle* of bourbon--and one of those nice little things of red wine. As soon as you can.

THE LOVER

Sure, hon. But I should advise you. Drinking that much alcohol when you're on a transatlantic flight can cause severe dehydration, blood clots in the legs, and can greatly increase jet lag. . .

JULIA

Dehydration. Okay, well, just bring me the bourbon, a *glass* of wine, and one of those 2-liter jugs of Evian off the duty-free cart. Oh, and one of those giant Toblerones too.

THE LOVER

That'll cost extra.

JULIA

Sure, fine. Just put it all on this credit card. And if the machine rejects that one, use this one. But try the red one first. It has a better interest rate than the blue one.

THE LOVER

Okay, ma'am. The lavatory's eight rows behind you on the right, by the way. (*Shakes his head and exits*)

JULIA

One of my transatlantic benders. Well, my only transatlantic bender. I was flying back from visiting Dieter in Zurich. Dieter. My ex-fiancé. The closest I ever came to happiness.

Ha. If Dieter was happiness, than I won't have to go through purgatory.

We had sort of a whirlwind romance. I met him at a coffeehouse.

Enter THE LOVER, as Dieter.

THE LOVER

(*With a German accent*) Hello there.

JULIA

Hi.

THE LOVER

(*Stiff*) How are you doing today?

JULIA

Oh, fine. Hey, where are you from?

THE LOVER

Where am I from—oh, you must mean my accent. I am from Switzerland.

JULIA

You sound German.

THE LOVER

Well, yah, I'm from the German-speaking part of Switzerland. Zurich. My name is Dieter. I couldn't help but notice you sitting over here with your pretty little book.

JULIA

My book isn't pretty.

THE LOVER

But you are.

JULIA

Well—

THE LOVER

I'm sorry, that was a little forward. Is that how you say in English—"forward"?

JULIA

Yes, that's right. That's very good, actually. I'm Julia.

THE LOVER

(Kneels and kisses her hand) It is a great honor to meet you, Julia.

JULIA

Oh my.

THE LOVER

Doesn't every man you meet kneel in awe of your great beauty?

JULIA

(Giggles) No.

THE LOVER

Well, I must say that is a great shame.

JULIA

You are absolutely charming.

THE LOVER

You deserve nothing less.

JULIA

A flatterer, too. Oh my. What brings you – I mean, brought you – to America?

THE LOVER

My job. I'm here on a special project. Just for two months. But looking at you makes me never want to leave.

JULIA

Whoa. I mean, whoa. What a swashbuckling, sexy man! I was totally caught off guard. Swept off my feet. Another cliché I know, but it was true. We were madly in love within hours, committed to each other in weeks. I was to become his wife, move with him to the Alps, and spend the rest of my life with him, pursuing my writing career and making a marriage among the glacier snows and waving fields of Edelweiss.

It was all going to be so beautiful. So perfect. Every woman's dream life.

Until...

THE LOVER

I have to return to Zurich a bit early. I think we should hold off on things for a while.

JULIA

Hold off?

THE LOVER

Take a breather. Is that how you say in English? Take a break.

JULIA

A break.

THE LOVER

Yes, a break. Just a short one. I'll fly you out to visit me in Zurich this fall. We can work everything out then.

JULIA

So we took a break. A short one, until we could work things out.

"Working things out" was something else entirely.

He left in May. I flew out to see him in September. By then I was nothing but a necessary nuisance to him. See, he'd bought the *nonrefundable* ticket in July.

THE LOVER

Why did you come here?

JULIA

You sent me a ticket. You told me to come and have a nice time.

THE LOVER

After I'd already changed my mind.

JULIA

Something you could have said before I came.

THE LOVER

I forgot.

JULIA

I'm here now.

THE LOVER

Yes. Sadly.

JULIA

What should I do?

THE LOVER

Sleep on the sofa. Stay until Saturday, and then fly home on standby.

JULIA

Can't we work this out? I've come all this way.

THE LOVER

No. No, of course not. I'm past all of that now. You should be too. It was just—well, it was nothing. Nothing at all.

JULIA

Nothing? It was nothing? We were nothing?

THE LOVER

Just stay out of the way when you're here. I have business associates over on a regular basis. The bath is at the end of the hall.

JULIA

Why are you doing this?

THE LOVER

Here's a tourist's map. Follow it around the city, see the sights.

JULIA

You expect me to pull myself up by the ankles in the middle of this and just be another American tourist?

THE LOVER

Yes. And here is a bill for your plane ticket. I expect to be paid back in full.

JULIA hands him the same red credit card she gave the flight attendant, returns to her airplane seat, where her bourbon and chocolate await her, and puts her face in her hands. THE LOVER exits.

JULIA

And so it was. I was reduced from an Alpine wife-to-be to an account receivable, just another positive mark in the column. Flying home across waves and turbulence, I drowned dreams of glaciers, embraces, and smiling blonde children with duty-free Maker's Mark and stale Swiss chocolate.

Enter THE LOVER, as flight attendant.

THE LOVER

How's all that working out for you? Okay? Hon, I was able to put the Maker's Mark and Toblerone on this card (*Hands her red credit card*), but that maxed it out. Do you still want the Evian and the wine? If you do I'll have to use the other card.

JULIA

Just the wine. Forget the Evian.

THE LOVER

All right sweetie, but you are gonna hate yourself when we land.

JULIA

Let me worry about that.

LIGHTS OUT.

ACT I: SCENE 7

AT RISE: DR. NUKULYE is in his office, reading patient files. The TELEPHONE RINGS.

DR. NUKULYE

Hello? Oh hello, Alistair. What a surprise! To what do I owe the honor of this call? Oh, of course. The conference. No, I'm afraid I won't be attending the surrogacy conference this year. Well, there are some...issues.

It must be very late over there now. Eleven o'clock? Well, yes, it's six hours ahead. Oh, I'm doing just wonderfully here, thank you for asking. How's everything at the Royal College?

DR. NUKULYE, *Continued*

Yes, things are fine here in Chicago. A bit cold, and the snow is up to the eaves, but otherwise just fine. Have my final project case going. Yes, a charity case! But it's a good one, I think. Strange girl. Manic depressive case. I think she's a latent lesbian, but she's definitely resistant to that diagnosis. Well, they all are, aren't they! A masochist, at the very least, with a familial history of schizophrenia. I saw a lot of this sort of thing among the educated Masai girls in Nairobi. They'd undergone genital mutilation before they left the tribe, and then they didn't know how to function sexually as single women—yes, yes, you understand. *(Pause)* Whatever do you mean, Alistair? Oh, no no no no. No, nothing like that has happened. I told you when I left London I was all through with that. Well, yes, I do believe it has definite therapeutic potential, but it's just not worth the risk. Look what happened at the Royal College. No, I haven't forgotten what you did for me, Alistair. I know—I could have been deported if it hadn't been for you. A bad business. I do appreciate your support in that case very much, but I think you and I would agree that the establishment at large just isn't ready for it. But I do admire your courage in taking it on. Well, you're tenured, it's different for you. The Americans aren't as forgiving as the British when it comes to that sort of thing, you know. Bloody Puritans. *(Laughs)* Of course. Certainly, certainly. Well, I'll definitely keep you posted on my progress. Cheers. *(Hangs up phone)*

LIGHTS OUT.

ACT I: SCENE 8

AT RISE: Spot on DR. NUKULYE.

DR. NUKULYE

In Kenya, I am a half-breed. The son of two enemy tribes. My father was Kikuyu, my mother was Masai. My father was poor—a low-level clerk under the British. Papa met my mother in Nairobi, where she had fled after her tribal puberty rites, and she was poor, too—a preschool teacher at a Methodist mission. She had come to the city as a child. Missionaries found her in the street, attempting to be a prostitute, but no one would buy her services because she had body lice and was covered with running sores. The missionaries picked her up and carried her home with them, nursed her to health, taught to read, write, and fear God. They civilized her. She became a native teacher at the mission, and was teaching a group of orphans in the square when my father met her on his lunch break. They pooled their scant resources to marry. I was their only child. You might say I am a symbol of Mama's reformation.

SPOT OUT.

ACT I: SCENE 9

AT RISE: A passage of time has occurred. Spot on JULIA and THE LOVER, who are meeting in a nightclub. DR. NUKULYE remains onstage in silhouette.

JULIA

Hi.

THE LOVER

Hi.

JULIA

I saw you dancing just now.

THE LOVER

Really?

JULIA

Yeah. You're a really bad dancer.

THE LOVER

Whoa. I'm sorry.

JULIA

That's OK. I like bad dancers. Bad dancers don't have any pretension or arrogance. They're usually better people than good dancers are. I'm a bad dancer, too. My name's Julia.
(Extends her hand)

THE LOVER

(Shakes her hand slowly) I'm Jürgen. Nice to meet you.

JULIA

Jürgen. What kind of name is that?

THE LOVER

It's Dutch. I'm from Amsterdam originally.

JULIA

You're Dutch? Wow. I never would have guessed. I mean, you hardly even have an accent.

THE LOVER

Well, that's normal for many of us Dutch. We begin speaking English almost from birth.

JULIA

Does that mean you stop speaking Dutch at birth?

THE LOVER

(Laughs) Oh no. We just do both, equally. May I ask you a question?

JULIA

Sure.

THE LOVER

Why is a young lady as lovely and as funny as you hanging around a singles club on a Saturday night?

JULIA

Oh, I guess for the same reason as all the other lovely, funny young ladies who are here. I'm looking for something.

THE LOVER

What is it you are looking for?

JULIA

What are *you* looking for?

THE LOVER

(Moves closer) Ask any of the young men who are in here alone, and I'm sure you'll get the same answer I would give.

JULIA

Should I go ask them?

THE LOVER

You could, but I would really miss you.

JULIA

You can wait a little while, couldn't you? Even if you would miss me a little bit?

THE LOVER

(Takes her hand) I suppose I could wait a bit. But only two minutes. Then I would have to come over and capture you and put you in my little car.

JULIA

You Europeans are so cute.

THE LOVER

You Americans are so cute. My place is just a mile from here, and I have a convertible.

JULIA

You drive a convertible in January in Chicago?

THE LOVER

Well, it's a very airtight convertible. Would you like to come with me?

JULIA

Well, I guess I don't have a choice.

THE LOVER

You have all the choices. You are the lady, so you say what you want to do.

JULIA

I want to go home with you. But that's all I'll say right now. What we do when we get there is something else entirely.

THE LOVER

Do you kiss below the belt?

JULIA

Sometimes. It depends.

THE LOVER

Then let's go, lady.

JULIA and THE LOVER freeze. Lights up on DR. NUKULYE.

DR. NUKULYE

Then what did you do?

JULIA breaks away from THE LOVER, who remains frozen.

JULIA

We went to his condo.

DR. NUKULYE

Where did he live?

JULIA

He lived in a luxury loft in the South Loop. Designer furniture, state of the art sound system, all that.

DR. NUKULYE

Hmm, posh dwelling, eh?

JULIA

Yes. Not that I go after people just for their money. I don't. I mean, generally I don't. It just so happened in this case that I did.

DR. NUKULYE

I see. Go on.

JULIA

So we went back to his place.

THE LOVER

Here's my car. It's the latest model.

JULIA

Wow. Nice.

THE LOVER

Yeah, I like it. Although it doesn't hold the turns as well as the last one I had.

JULIA

Well. Um. That's—that's too bad. But this one is very nice. Really.

THE LOVER

You know what? You're doing the right thing going out with a European like me. European men are true gentlemen. American men are just completely uncivilized. They aren't gentlemen. They don't know how to treat a lady.

JULIA

You really think so?

THE LOVER

Oh, absolutely. (*Opening the car door for JULIA*) So, what do you want to do?

JULIA

I don't know.

THE LOVER

You are the lady. You have to tell me what you want.

JULIA

(*Bashful*) I don't know. Anything's fine.

THE LOVER freezes; JULIA addresses DR. NUKULYE.

JULIA, *Continued*

But the problem was, I didn't know what I wanted. I wasn't sure if I wanted sex, or a hug, or if I just wanted a glass of wine and a nice conversation. Nice conversation with a man. That's something that I lack in my life. I'm not sure I've ever had a nice conversation with a man.

DR. NUKULYE

Why not?

JULIA

It just never seems to get that far. The physical stuff gets in the way.

DR. NUKULYE

Did it get in the way this time?

JULIA

Yeah.

DR. NUKULYE

How did it get in the way?

JULIA returns to scene with THE LOVER; he gets out of the car and opens door for JULIA.

JULIA

Wow, this is a really neat building. They made apartments out of a factory?

THE LOVER

Yes, it used to be a margarine-making plant. Now it has luxury condos.

JULIA

That's just amazing. Does it still smell like margarine inside?

THE LOVER

Not anymore, I'm afraid. Come on in. Would you like a glass of wine?

JULIA

Oh yes, please.

THE LOVER

(Pours wine and gives it to her) That's a 1982 burgundy. Very precious.

JULIA

(Sips) Wow. That's really good. I've never had anything like that before.

THE LOVER

Be right back. (*Exits*)

JULIA

This is where I started getting scared.

DR. NUKULYE

What were you scared of?

JULIA

I was just scared. Maybe not *scared*. Nervous is a better word.

DR. NUKULYE

You didn't answer my question. What were you scared of?

JULIA

That something would happen. I wasn't sure what. I went to his place knowing something would, but when I got there I wasn't ready for it. I was hoping I could enjoy the wine and that he'd like, *talk* to me or something, since he'd just spent all this time telling me what kind of a European gentleman he was.

DR. NUKULYE

Is that what happened?

JULIA

No.

Re-enter THE LOVER, undressed and with an obvious bulge in his crotch. He stands to face JULIA and thrusts his pelvis into her face.

JULIA

Um, what are you doing?

THE LOVER

It's time for you to act like a lady.

JULIA

Okay—maybe I better go.

THE LOVER

(*Grabs wine glass*) No, I think you better stay. (*Crowds her*) I'll make it worth your while.

JULIA

Look—

THE LOVER places both hands on JULIA's shoulders and pushes her to her knees. LIGHTS CHANGE to indicate a passage of time. THE LOVER steps to one side, still facing JULIA.

DR. NUKULYE

How did that make you feel?

JULIA

How did that make me feel? It pissed me off. I mean, just a little. You sit down to enjoy a perfectly good glass of wine and then somebody sticks his penis in your face? Talk about rude!

DR. NUKULYE

So you thought it was *impolite* of him to do that?

JULIA

You better believe it was impolite.

DR. NUKULYE

Impolite is all?

JULIA

I don't know how else to describe it.

DR. NUKULYE

Why did you go to his home in the first place?

JULIA

I just wanted someone to talk to. He seemed like he would be nice to talk to.

DR. NUKULYE

I think you misjudged what he was looking for.

JULIA

I know. I know I did. It's just that—it's just that I always misjudge people when it comes to this. I don't know why—it just happens. I always go in with the highest expectations and end up getting the lowest results possible.

DR. NUKULYE

So you regard sexual intercourse as the lowest common denominator?

JULIA

Well, no. Well—maybe not in theory.

DR. NUKULYE

What about in practice?

JULIA

In practice, everything just ends up in a mess.

DR. NUKULYE

A mess. I see. So, what did he do next?

JULIA

After the...penis thing?

DR. NUKULYE

I assume he imposed it upon you?

JULIA

Yes. Yeah, he did. Then he dragged me into his room.

THE LOVER grabs JULIA's arm and throws her onto the couch.

DR. NUKULYE

So he forcibly led you into his bedroom?

JULIA

Well, not quite forcibly, but he was pretty insistent. My shoulder hurt the next day because he pulled my arm so hard.

DR. NUKULYE

Did it ever occur to you to leave?

JULIA

No.

DR. NUKULYE

Why not?

JULIA

Everything happened so fast. . .and I was kind of drunk from the nightclub and the wine—and he drove to his place so fast, I didn't know exactly where I was, or how I would find the subway or a cab—all I could think of or see or *understand* was this giant penis he'd shoved in my mouth.

DR. NUKULYE

Then what happened? Did you have intercourse?

JULIA

No.

DR. NUKULYE

Did he do anything for you?

JULIA

What do you mean?

DR. NUKULYE

Did he do anything for you sexually? Did you receive any kind of sexual satisfaction from him?

JULIA

Oh. Well, no.

DR. NUKULYE

So you were not sexually attracted to him? You weren't interested in having sex with a man?

JULIA

No. Please don't play the gay card again. That's not what this is about at all.

DR. NUKULYE

Are you sure?

JULIA

I'm positive. Jesus Christ. If you were in my position, would you want to have sex with this man?

DR. NUKULYE

I am not in your position, am I Julia?

JULIA

Let me tell you what he did to me. After the whole—penis thing, after that he kind of fingered me a little bit, and he slapped me a few times and called me something in Dutch that I didn't understand. Then he tried to go in, but he was limp, couldn't get it up, so he got kind of mad and decided to go to sleep. He told me I could sleep over if I wanted to.

DR. NUKULYE

Did you?

JULIA

By then I was tired and it was really late, and I was also more than a little drunk. So I did.

DR. NUKULYE

You slept in the same bed with this man?

JULIA

Yeah. What else was I supposed to do, like go out on his balcony or something? It was the middle of January.

DR. NUKULYE

It just seems that after what happened, you might be more than a bit repulsed by him. As a man.

JULIA

Oh, I was repulsed by him. But not in the way you think. I was repulsed by him because of what he did to me.

DR. NUKULYE

Of course. Of course you were. And still you stayed?

JULIA

Yes. In hindsight, not the best thing to do, but what other choice did I have?

DR. NUKULYE

I think you had many choices.

JULIA

I disagree. He had me by the balls—that is, if I had any balls.

DR. NUKULYE

That's a very interesting comment to make, Julia. Very interesting.

JULIA

Why is it interesting?

DR. NUKULYE

I think it speaks directly to your sexuality.

JULIA

Are you saying that I should be a man? Why are you so hung up on this? What are you trying to make me do?

DR. NUKULYE

I'm not trying to make you do anything. And I'm not saying you should be a man—that's just absurd. Perhaps what I am saying is that you and I should move into discussing your sexuality – that is, your sexual behavior – in our sessions more than we are. In great detail, in fact. I think the cause of your depression is rooted in your sexual history.

JULIA

Why are you so interested in that?

DR. NUKULYE

I come from a psychiatric school of thinking that believes that the specific details of one's sexual behavior is the key to unlocking all other psychological problems. In the past, I've even used some rather...radical therapies to help solve my patients' problems.

JULIA

How radical?

DR. NUKULYE

We don't have to discuss that right now. Why don't you return to your story about what happened with Jürgen? After you got into bed to sleep with him, once he had dragged you into his room? Was he brutal with you?

JULIA

He wasn't all that bad. I mean, it could have been a lot worse.

DR. NUKULYE

So he was violent?

JULIA

Well, he shoved me around a little.

DR. NUKULYE

Where?

JULIA

In his bed. I guess he wasn't used to sleeping next to someone.

DR. NUKULYE

Was there anything pleasant about this experience?

JULIA

Well—I guess there were some nice things. His bed was big and soft, with down comforters and satin sheets. I sure don't have anything like that. Sure, he was a little rough, but the sheets made up for it a little. It was kind of like sleeping inside a cactus flower. *(Pause)* He even saw me out the door the next morning.

THE LOVER

(From behind the couch) So sorry things didn't work out as nicely as they should have. I think you are a very nice lady, but I think we're just too different. Have a safe trip home. *(Exits)*

JULIA

The day after I found myself even liking him a little bit. Wishing that he would call me.

DR. NUKULYE

And this made you feel better?

JULIA

For a while.

DR. NUKULYE

What did you do when it stopped helping?

JULIA

I went out looking again.

DR. NUKULYE

I see. Has it ever occurred to you that you may have a destructive pattern of behavior when it comes to your sexual relationships? That you tend to be attracted to narcissists who, by nature, aren't interested in you or your well-being at all?

JULIA

Yes, I suppose it has, a little.

DR. NUKULYE

Have you ever considered that you may be choosing men that abuse you so that you won't have to have a deep relationship? That you are actually setting yourself up to fail?

JULIA

I don't know.

DR. NUKULYE

Why not?

JULIA

I was kind hoping you could help me find out what is wrong with me. That's why I'm here, after all.

DR. NUKULYE

Well, yes, of course. I think we should stop there for today. For now, I think I'd like you to think back carefully over your sexual history. Think about every encounter you've ever had, especially those that you look back on painfully.

JULIA exits. DR. NUKULYE pauses to pour himself some coffee and look over JULIA's file. He becomes increasingly nervous, and as he does so goes to his filing cabinet and begins to rapidly flip through it.

DR. NUKULYE

Oh, this is going to be a job. I need to find at least one other case like hers. Just so I can have something to go on. She's complex. I don't have time for that. Board certification cases need to be neatly wrapped up in a little bow, not drawn out for months. If only I could use the surrogacy therapy. . . Let's see—where is that incest case I intervened on in London—Smith, Smathers, Snider—here it is. Swanson. Sarah Swanson. (*Opens file and reads*) “Sarah Swanson. Twenty-eight-year-old female with a history of manic depression, latent homosexuality, and sexually destructive behavior...

LIGHTS OUT.

ACT I: SCENE 10

AT RISE: JULIA and DR. NUKULYE are on stage together.

DR. NUKULYE

Over the past few sessions, I've come to the conclusion that you tend to pick the same man to date over and over. Not *literally* the same man, of course, but you tend to choose a certain type over and over again.

JULIA

What type is that?

DR. NUKULYE

You invariably choose to seek intimacy with narcissists. The inherent problem with that, of course, is that narcissists are incapable of intimacy. Further, sex with dysfunctional father figures is contrary to your own sexual makeup. I believe that's what making you so depressed.

JULIA

Uh huh. So what does that mean?

DR. NUKULYE

You have high levels of hostility to men in general. That seems to be a recurring pattern with you in therapy. That is typical of many patients suffering from the kinds of problems you do. In a nutshell, your failure to have a healthy relationship with any man ultimately means you have never faced the possibility that sexual intimacy with men isn't what you want at all.

JULIA

I am not a lesbian.

DR. NUKULYE

You say that with such hostility. Are you afraid of the truth?

JULIA

I'm saying it with hostility because it just isn't true, and you keep insisting it is.

DR. NUKULYE

Aren't you willing to explore the possibility?

JULIA

I'll explore anything you want, but you are barking up the wrong tree here. This just isn't why I came to see you. I may not understand a lot about myself, but I understand that much, at least.

DR. NUKULYE

Why did you come to see me, then?

JULIA

I came because I am depressed as hell, and I am sick of being dicked around by everybody. . .

DR. NUKULYE

Who's "everybody"?

JULIA

We have already been through all that! Why can't you just listen to me, instead of floating all these theories?

DR. NUKULYE

I think your latent homosexuality is a bit more than a theory.

JULIA

Wait. You think that because I've had some bad relationships that I have to be a lesbian? That's totally what you think, isn't it?

DR. NUKULYE

All signs seem to point to that.

JULIA

Whose signs? Not mine.

DR. NUKULYE

I think you might be well-suited to have a sexual encounter with another woman. It could open some new emotional doors for you. I can even help arrange it, if you like. I have used sexual surrogacy therapy in the past, with success. . .

JULIA

All right, that's it. I'm out of here. I am totally out of here. *(Gets up to leave)*

DR. NUKULYE

I don't think you should leave.

JULIA

I don't give a shit what you think.

DR. NUKULYE

If you terminate therapy now the consequences could be disastrous. You are very fragile right now. It could easily make your situation worse.

JULIA

What the hell do you know? You don't know me. You don't have any idea what it's like to be me. You don't walk around in these shoes, this...this *body*! You don't know anything about me! I don't know why I've bothered to keep coming here for the past two months, since you obviously haven't listened to a thing I've said!

DR. NUKULYE

Julia, I hope you realize what you're doing.

JULIA

I know exactly what I'm doing. I'm leaving.

DR. NUKULYE

I don't think you should leave.

JULIA

I don't care what you think. I just want to get out of here. Please, I just want to get out of here.

DR. NUKULYE

(Blocks JULIA's path) Are you sure you know what you're doing?

JULIA

(Trying to get past him) Yeah. Trying to get away from *you*.

DR. NUKULYE

(Grabs her shoulders) Are you trying to get away from me or from someone else?

JULIA

(Shoving him) YOU! Get OUT OF MY WAY!! You'll never get anything more out of me for your—your board certification, bullshit, or whatever. What do you really know about me? Nothing!

JULIA finally manages to get past DR. NUKULYE and heads for the door, pausing for a moment before she leaves to look back at him with contempt. JULIA storms out. DR. NUKULYE nonchalantly closes JULIA's folder, leaves it on his desk, and exits.

END OF ACT I

ACT II: SCENE 1

AT RISE: JULIA at the reception desk at DR. NUKULYE's off. She is in an agitated state.

JULIA

I know I walked out on my last session. I know. I—You already went over all of that. I know I didn't adhere to the program's guidelines when I—I know this a free service and all, but I don't see why I should be expected to—

Look, I'm very sorry. I apologize. I sincerely do. But I was upset. I mean, Dr. Nukulye even said that I am "severely affected." Can't we just chalk all of it up to that? Severely affected people have... well, issues. I mean, isn't that why I'm here?

Please, please give me a second chance. Please. I'm really not doing well at all. Yesterday I thought about gulping an entire bottle of Bufferin with my dinner—I don't know what else to do. The temp agency I work for just cancelled my insurance, since I haven't been getting enough work, and I'm hardly even making the rent—Yes, I'll fill all the paperwork out again. Fine.

JULIA takes a loaded clipboard and pen from the desk as LIGHTS FADE OUT.

ACT II: SCENE 2

AT RISE: DR. NUKULYE is at his desk talking on the telephone.

DR. NUKULYE

Alistair, good morning. Well, "good afternoon" for you. I'm sorry I didn't return your call sooner. Yes, it's early here—just after seven. I've been rather busy—a few things have hit the fan in the past couple of weeks with my certification case patient. She had well, an episode. The other week. A bit of a mess, but last evening I heard from the secretary she's coming back for more therapy. Like I said, she's a real masochist. She's due back today at three. Yes, the twenty-seven year old female manic depressive. Uh huh. Uh huh. Mmm-hmm. No, she came in through the regular Intake office. Uh huh, that's right. Probable incest; latent homosexuality, all that. Yes, she always stretches out on the couch full-length. Yes, that's rather a rare thing. Makes me feel a bit like Freud when he was treating Dora. She reminds me of that lecture we attended at the surrogacy conference all those years ago—what was it? The theories we picked up in that lecture were to be the basis of my test case—well, before the...unpleasantness. *(Laughs)* Fine. Fine. I am thinking of reintroducing it into my work with her, though. I know it's risky, so it will be in a modified form, of course. Perhaps I'll

DR. NUKULYE, *Continued*

integrate it with some things we Kikuyu-Masai half-breeds believe in. *(Laughs)* There's something to some of that old witch-doctor stuff, you know. Well, we'll see. Yes, do email me those pictures from your safari. Jolly glad you enjoyed your trip to Kenya. I'm thrilled to be the one that inspired it. Yes. Well, carry on then. Cheers.

DR. NUKULYE hangs up the phone and begins reading through his notes as LIGHTS FADE OUT.

ACT II: SCENE 3

AT RISE: JULIA has returned to DR. NUKULYE's office for her first session in several weeks.

JULIA

Umm, hi.

DR. NUKULYE

Good afternoon. Please have a seat.

JULIA

Okay.

DR. NUKULYE

So how are you today?

JULIA

Okay, I guess.

DR. NUKULYE

You sound more than a bit unsure.

JULIA

I haven't been doing very well lately.

DR. NUKULYE

I understand you almost attempted suicide?

JULIA

Well, I didn't actually go through with it. And I don't think that Bufferin would have hurt me that much. You know like the commercial says, it's "designed not to irritate the stomach" and all. *(Laughs weakly)*

DR. NUKULYE

Is that what brought you back after all this time?

JULIA

I guess so.

DR. NUKULYE

I see.

JULIA

You still really pissed me off, you know.

DR. NUKULYE

You shouldn't feel sorry for what you did. Your outburst during our last session was an important step in your recovery process.

JULIA

What?

DR. NUKULYE

The first step in breaking down sexual inhibition barriers oftentimes is rage.

JULIA

You are still on this lesbian theory? I am *suicidal* here! Isn't that a bit more important than your theory?

DR. NUKULYE

I don't think you are suicidal, Julia. What you thought about doing yesterday was simply an excuse. An excuse generated by your subconscious to compel you back into therapy, so that you may finally face what is driving your depression.

JULIA

If this is what you are going to be doing to me in therapy, I would have been better off swallowing all that Bufferin.

DR. NUKULYE

That's no way to talk, Julia.

JULIA

I am only trying to tell you the truth about what I am feeling. I came to therapy to get better, not to be molded into something I am not.

DR. NUKULYE

Perhaps you would be more comfortable in another therapeutic environment? I can refer you to some private therapists who use more traditional methods. They will take a lot longer to help you than my own, though...

JULIA

I can't go to a private therapist. I have no health insurance and no money. This is all I could get.

DR. NUKULYE

So I suppose we are stuck with each other, eh?

JULIA

I suppose so. Look, can't I just have some Prozac or something?

DR. NUKULYE

Until I receive my American accreditation, I am not authorized to dispense psychoactive drugs without the consent of the attending physician. Under our program's guidelines, you are not sick enough to need drug therapy.

JULIA

How sick do I have to get before you give me drugs? I mean, I think I'm pretty sick now.

DR. NUKULYE

I think considering your past drug use history...

JULIA

I took *one* hit off a bong.

DR. NUKULYE

We can discuss your drug history later...

JULIA

I *have* no drug history!

DR. NUKULYE

You seem like you are still very agitated.

JULIA

Of course I am agitated! Why do you think I came back!? Please, please just *help* me—I'm broke, I feel like shit all the time, nobody else will help me! I don't know where else to turn...

JULIA bursts into tears.

DR. NUKULYE

It's all right, Julia. We're going to do this together. You're going to get better. I have faith in you.

BLACK OUT.

ACT II: SCENE 3

AT RISE: Spotlight on DR. NUKULYE.

DR. NUKULYE

Supposedly, my Kikuyu people were created at the summit of Mt. Kenya. Gikuyu and his wife Mumbai had nine daughters there who founded the nine clans of the Kikuyu. Why daughters, and not sons? This was never explained to me when I was a boy. But when I went to university I learned that this was a remnant from the prehistoric Kikuyu religion. In ancient times, Mumbai was the chief goddess, all others were her servants, and ancient Kikuyu society mirrored this arrangement. At some point the men grew tired of their women rulers, rose up, and rebelled. After that, Gikuyu ruled supreme.

Kikuyu women are shrill, meddling wenches, who shave their heads and dance like crazed firewomen. They manipulate tribal affairs like clay. They are eager for sex and marry too early. This is why my father chose a Masai woman. Masai women are used to serving Masai men, who are fearsome warriors. They have fewer children, and die younger. And they make for cheaper wives, since they don't demand bachelors' dowries before marriage, like the Kikuyu women do.

SPOT OUT.

ACT II: SCENE 4

AT RISE: Dream sequence. JULIA is dressed as a 14-year old girl, flipping through teenybopper magazines. She picks up the phone and dials.

JULIA

Hi, Cindy? Hi. Oh my *God!* Can you believe what he did in Science class today? (*Giggles*) I know. Stuck that whole worm up his *nose*. (*Long pause*) No. No way. He did not. Well, that just goes to show— *I know!* She is such a bitch. I can't believe she did that. I mean, she knows that you and Danny have only been going steady for *three whole weeks!* So, what are you going to do? Uh huh. Uh huh. Nuh-uh!! Oh my God. Wow. Okay. So like, we'll go up to her after school and put the note in her backpack so she'll find it in study hall. Okay, cool. What? No way! Justin Timberlake tickets? That is like, so awesome. Of course I'll go with you.

There is a knock at the door.

JULIA, *Continued*

What?

THE LOVER, *Offstage*

Julia? What are you doing in there? It's time for bed!

JULIA

Just talking on the phone, Daddy! Cindy, I gotta go—that's my dad. Yeah, Ok. I'll see you in class tomorrow. Bye.

Enter THE LOVER, dressed as JULIA's father.

THE LOVER

It's time for bed, Julia.

JULIA

(Timidly) Yeah, I know. I'm sorry. I was just talking to Cindy.

THE LOVER

Remember how we talked about being on the phone at this time of the night?

JULIA

Yeah, I remember.

THE LOVER

No more talking on the phone after 9:00.

JULIA

(Exasperated) Okay!

THE LOVER

Remember what else we talked about?

JULIA

What?

THE LOVER

You know, our special plans?

JULIA

(Looks down) Yeah, I remember.

THE LOVER

It's our secret, right?

JULIA

Yeah.

THE LOVER

That's my good girl. Now don't be looking at your magazines all night long—you have school tomorrow.

JULIA

Okay. Good night.

THE LOVER

Good night.

THE LOVER embraces her slowly, and kisses her passionately on the mouth. THE LOVER exits. JULIA thumbs through the magazines for a few more beats, then curls up to sleep as LIGHTS FADE OUT.

ACT II: SCENE 4

AT RISE: JULIA is back in DR. NUKULYE's office. She looks tired and is wearing a large hat, concealing her scalp almost completely.

DR. NUKULYE

So how have things been this week?

JULIA

Weird.

DR. NUKULYE

Weird. Weird how?

JULIA

I don't know, really. I feel like I'm walking around in a fog all the time.

DR. NUKULYE

Can you give me an example?

JULIA

Well, like what happened the other day, I guess.

DR. NUKULYE

What happened?

JULIA

I was walking to the el. It was the only day that week the temp agency had found anything for me to do, and I was excited since the job I'd been given was supposed to last for six days, paying thirteen dollars an hour. That was good—it would help me make the rent and catch up a few bills. And it felt good to get out of the apartment, too.

DR. NUKULYE

You've been staying at home most of the time?

JULIA

Yeah. Staying at home and staying in bed. It's just as well I wasn't getting any work—I can hardly even get up some days.

DR. NUKULYE

So you have been very depressed.

JULIA

I think we established that already.

DR. NUKULYE

Yes, but are you more depressed now than you have been?

JULIA

Not more depressed. Just in a different way.

DR. NUKULYE

What way is that?

JULIA

I feel lost all the time. I feel like there is a huge weight sitting on top of my head all the time, holding me down, keeping me still.

DR. NUKULYE

I see. So you were walking to the el. Then what happened?

JULIA

Well, I was walking with this kind of tunnel vision, almost floating, not seeing anything around me at all. I'd been feeling that way all week lying around at home, too. But suddenly, right before I got to the el, suddenly everything just went away.

DR. NUKULYE

How do you mean?

JULIA

I passed out. I fainted.

DR. NUKULYE

You fainted?

JULIA

Yeah, right in the middle of the sidewalk. But only for a few seconds, I think. I hit my head on the pavement on my way down, and that sort of woke me up. Only sort of, though. Somebody found me and called an ambulance on their cell phone. I think. I never knew who it was.

DR. NUKULYE

You went to the hospital?

JULIA

Yeah. Somebody found an ambulance and I went. I guess to see if I got a concussion.

DR. NUKULYE

Did you?

JULIA

No. I just cracked my head open.

DR. NUKULYE

What?

JULIA

It's not as bad as it sounds. It's just a medium-sized cut, but it did bleed a lot. Right at the place where your scalp meets the nape of your neck. They bandaged it in the ER and just sent me home. It looks kind of bad, and I guess it will be a while before the hair grows in enough for it to look normal again. I'm wearing the hat to cover everything.

DR. NUKULYE

I see. And did you go to work after this happened?

JULIA

No. When I finally called the temp agency to tell them what happened, they had already fired me.

DR. NUKULYE

I see. You don't have health insurance, either?

JULIA

No. I don't know how I'm going to pay the bill, unless I call my dad and ask for help.

DR. NUKULYE

I recall that you haven't spoken to your father in some years.

JULIA

That's right. But I did have a dream about him the other night, so maybe that was a sign of some kind. That I needed to talk to him again.

DR. NUKULYE

(Obviously very interested now) Really? A dream about your father? Tell me about it.

JULIA

Oh, it was nothing. Just something about him kissing me goodnight when I was about fourteen. I don't remember much else. I usually don't remember my dreams at all, in fact, so I'm surprised I remember that much.

DR. NUKULYE

Are you sure that's all? Try telling me more about it.

JULIA

Well, I was on the phone talking to one of my school friends, you know, about dumb teenage crap—

DR. NUKULYE

Go on.

JULIA

Well, it was kind of late, and my dad comes knocking on the door telling me to get off the phone and go to bed. Then he kisses me goodnight, tucks me in like a little girl, and that's it.

DR. NUKULYE

I see. Julia, I need for you to clarify something for me.

JULIA

What's that?

DR. NUKULYE

Did you have the dream before you fainted in the street, or after?

JULIA

Why?

DR. NUKULYE

It's very important for me to know exactly when this occurred.

JULIA

I think I had the dream the night before the fainting thing happened.

DR. NUKULYE

Are you sure?

JULIA

Pretty sure.

DR. NUKULYE

Julia, that's excellent. Excellent news.

JULIA

How is that excellent? I mean, I cracked my head open.

DR. NUKULYE

I think you are close to achieving a breakthrough.

JULIA

A breakthrough?

DR. NUKULYE

Yes.

JULIA

What's that?

DR. NUKULYE

Essentially, it's when a patient breaks down one of the psychological barriers responsible for their mental state. For you, the nature of your relationship with your father is the key to your neuroses, and it seems some of your repressed memories are starting to rise to the surface. That will help us greatly in our therapy.

JULIA

All he did was kiss me goodnight. Fathers do that every day, all around the world. What's the big deal?

DR. NUKULYE

That might become more evident in our next few sessions. Julia, I must now ask you a question, and I need for you to take it very seriously.

JULIA

Okay.

DR. NUKULYE

Are you prepared to take your therapy to the next level?

JULIA

What level is that?

DR. NUKULYE

I believe it is time for us to do something radical in our sessions. Something that will send these barriers that are holding you back crashing down. I assure you that it would be safe and properly supervised.

JULIA

What are you driving at?

DR. NUKULYE

Sexual surrogacy. I think it could help you tremendously.

JULIA

What? No way.

DR. NUKULYE

It could do wonders for your situation. And to be frank, your current situation is rather grim. You have nothing to lose.

JULIA

Grim, huh?

DR. NUKULYE

Yes.

JULIA

Why should I do this? Why should I trust you? What have you done for me besides tell me I'm a lesbian and go on and on about how much you know about schizophrenia? You haven't cured me. You've just made me feel worse!

DR. NUKULYE

But you're here. You're still coming here. Something inside you must make you want to come back.

JULIA

I—but—

DR. NUKULYE

Why should you do this? Let's make a laundry list, eh? You've lost your job and have no prospects for another. You spend your time jumping into bed with strange men who abuse and malign you. You have never had a healthy relationship with anyone. You've been in therapy your whole life and yet you're still as malfunctional as a Range Rover in a monsoon. You haven't spoken to your father in years. You have no money. No health insurance. You admit to yourself that you barely function—you can't get out of bed most days, and when you do, you fall down in the street, to be picked up and carried to the hospital by strangers. As a result of all that, you've got a rather messy head injury. And most of all, you keep coming to therapy with me week after week, even though you repeatedly say things to the effect that I

DR. NUKULYE, *Continued*

am unqualified buffoon and my theories about you are full of hot air. You have no more choices left, Julia. You're stuck. But I can do something that will help you. I've helped other women, just like you, help themselves and get on with their lives. I suggest you take advantage of it, or mark my words, you will end up in an alley smeared with the semen of a toothless crack addict.

Now, are you with me or aren't you?

JULIA nods, trembling. BLACKOUT.

ACT II: SCENE 6

AT RISE: Spot on DR. NUKULYE.

DR. NUKULYE

In Kenya today, the Kikuyu are shrewd capitalists who run the country better than the British ever could. We own almost all the merchants' stalls in the Nairobi marketplace, we are educated and Christian. We were the first to get on with the British as equals, and then we were the ones who threw them out. We are the most civilized tribe of all, and the country belongs to us. I left Kenya to become a psychiatrist of some renown. As civilized as we Kikuyu are, we haven't been as rapid to embrace the sciences. Too many Kikuyu still cling to our old tribal rites, even while they run modern shops and buy fancy cars. Modern psychiatry is rare there. I hope I can enlighten my people with the knowledge I've gained someday, when I return.

LIGHTS OUT.

ACT II: SCENE 7

AT RISE: JULIA and THE LOVER sitting together on DR. NUKULYE's couch. THE LOVER is dressed all in black.

JULIA

Hello.

THE LOVER

Greetings.

JULIA

Who are you?

THE LOVER

Oh, let's just say I'm a very close friend of yours. Your shadow. I've been with you for a long time.

JULIA

So you're like, my memory or something?

THE LOVER

I prefer to be called your collective unconscious.

JULIA

If I remember my Psych 101, collective unconscious is something possessed by a whole society.

THE LOVER

Not quite. I'm afraid your scientists haven't figured that one out yet. Jung almost had it, but not quite. You people are not ready to understand it. Just call me "old friend."

JULIA

Okay. So, old friend, what do you think?

THE LOVER

About what?

JULIA

About all this.

THE LOVER

You mean the baggage.

JULIA

Yeah. My baggage. My beautiful, patterned baggage. Designer, no less.

THE LOVER

You sure have a lot of it.

JULIA

Yeah, I know.

THE LOVER

Why did you drag all of it in here?

JULIA

It was getting too heavy.

THE LOVER

Yes, that happens sometimes.

JULIA

Sad but true.

An awkward moment follows.

THE LOVER

So, what are you going to do now?

JULIA

About what?

THE LOVER

You know.

JULIA

No, I don't.

THE LOVER

(Tickling her) Yes you do.

JULIA

(Giggling; fights him off) No, I don't. Wait. *(Suddenly serious)* You mean...*(THE LOVER nods)* Oh. I—I don't think I can do that.

THE LOVER

You have to.

JULIA

I can't.

THE LOVER

You will.

JULIA

What if something happens?

THE LOVER

You'll be OK. Don't worry.

JULIA

What if I die?

THE LOVER

(Rolls his eyes) You won't die.

JULIA

But it—when I think about that, it feels like I will.

THE LOVER

That's your imagination.

JULIA

How do you know?

THE LOVER

Let's just say I've been around.

JULIA

Oh. Around where?

THE LOVER

(Throws up his hands) I've been around a lot longer than you have. You don't believe me? I'll tell you something I really shouldn't. You're an old soul.

JULIA

How old?

THE LOVER

I can't tell you that. But pretty old. I promise, nothing bad will happen if you just do this thing.

JULIA

Promise?

THE LOVER

Promise.

BLACKOUT.

ACT II: SCENE 8

AT RISE: JULIA is in DR. NUKULYE's office, awaiting her first meeting about her sexual surrogate program.

DR. NUKULYE

Hello, Julia. It's nice to see you.

JULIA

Hi.

DR. NUKULYE

So you've decided to go through with this.

JULIA

What choice do I have?

DR. NUKULYE

That's my girl. Well, I suppose you have a lot of questions.

JULIA

Yeah.

DR. NUKULYE

Well, why don't you start out with one or two of them?

JULIA

I guess I just want to know what I'm supposed to do.

DR. NUKULYE

Well, essentially, I've arranged for you to meet with a professional sexual surrogate, who will help break your inhibitions about sexual contact with women.

JULIA

A prostitute, you mean.

DR. NUKULYE

Oh, no. Not at all. Sexual surrogates are trained paraprofessionals, not prostitutes. I'm not running an escort service here. I'm trying to help people. You need to explore your true sexuality, with a woman.

JULIA

I still don't think this is where my problem is. I think my problem is more with men.

DR. NUKULYE

I'm here to show you where your true problems lie, Julia. You need to trust me.

JULIA

I don't know if I should.

DR. NUKULYE

I know you are suspicious. That's normal. And there is no set schedule as to how you should progress with the surrogate. You just go at your own pace. The first meeting you may just talk. For some people, that's enough. In your case, however, I think you will need to have sexual contact with the professional at some point, before you make any real progress.

JULIA

Okay, fine. Since I have no other options, I'm willing to talk to this person at least, but I'm really not sure about—

DR. NUKULYE

You're going to be fine, Julia. Don't worry. Let's get started, then. (*Hands her a business card*) Here's the name and phone number of the surrogate. Give her a call, and set up your first meeting. Your first meeting will probably just be conversation, of course.

JULIA

You mean like a first date?

DR. NUKULYE

That's a very good way of putting it. Then once you've had a few of those, you'll need to report back to me, so I can observe your first sexual encounter.

JULIA

What?

DR. NUKULYE

I have to observe your progress if I'm going to be able to cure you of your crippling dysfunction.

JULIA

You mean you like girl-on-girl porn.

DR. NUKULYE

Attacking me isn't going to help you, Julia.

JULIA

I know. You always say that.

DR. NUKULYE

Now, I know this is all quite scary for you. But I assure you, this is the best path for you to take—

JULIA

Are you sure this is legal?

DR. NUKULYE

Well, yes. Well, it's legal in theory.

JULIA

In theory. What about in practice?

DR. NUKULYE

In practice it's a bit fuzzy.

JULIA

Oh really?

DR. NUKULYE

That brings me to my next point. I mentioned a few sessions ago how I had used radical therapies with women not unlike yourself in the past. Sexual surrogacy is not widely accepted in many circles, especially in the United States. In fact, it was quite common in New York and Boston in the 1980s, but it fell out of favor after—well, there were some problems.

JULIA

What kind of problems?

DR. NUKULYE

Several surrogacy practices were shut down by the police as illegal brothels. Some psychiatrists even went to jail for a time. So you see the limb I'm going out on to help you here, Julia—

JULIA

Oh, great. This is just great. Look, I think I'm going to be leaving now. *(Gets up to leave)*

DR. NUKULYE grabs her arm and firmly sets her back down on the couch.

DR. NUKULYE

You are going to do this, Julia. You are going to take the first step in healing yourself. If you don't, you're going to swallow that bottle of Bufferin for real next time. And next time, it probably won't be Bufferin. It'll be sleeping pills, or worse.

JULIA folds her arms and stares at DR. NUKULYE with contempt.

DR. NUKULYE

Do you want to end up dead, Julia?

JULIA

No.

DR. NUKULYE

I shouldn't think so. You're young, you have your whole life ahead of you. Now call the surrogate. I will want a full report of your first meeting when you return for your next session.

BLACKOUT.

ACT II: SCENE 9

AT RISE: JULIA is at home nervously staring at the phone and clutching the surrogate's business card. After a long pause, she picks up the phone and dials.

JULIA

Hello? Um, hi. My name is Julia Tannenbaum, and I'm calling you because Dr. Nukulye—yeah. So you know what's going on. Great. Well, before we get started can I just say one thing? I really don't know why I'm doing this. I think Dr. Nukulye is full of crap half the time. Yeah, well—you know what I mean. Why? Well, I don't have any health insurance right now, so I 'm sort of stuck with him and his therapy. No. Oh no. No, I don't think that's what I'm looking for. Not at all. I just want to talk to someone who will really listen. Will you listen to me? That's all I really need right now. Oh, that's great. Thank you so much.

Yeah, I know. Does he always do that? Oh. Oh, I thought you would have worked with him before. "Work." Is that the word you use for what you do? (*JULIA shudders*)

Yeah, why don't we meet for coffee tonight? Caribou Coffee on Halstead. Sounds good. See you then.

BLACKOUT.

ACT II: SCENE 10

AT RISE: DR. NUKULYE is at his laptop, typing. He appears to be plagiarizing most of the text from the file of Sarah Swanson.

DR. NUKULYE

“Study of the Julia Tannenbaum charity case continued through last week. Twenty-seven-year-old manic-depressive female with a tendency toward latent lesbianism. Latent homosexuality diagnosis resulted in dissociative hostility and denial on the part of the patient. Suggestion of clinical sex therapy was received by patient with some hostility. Unsure if patient will return for further therapy. If she does, I plan to observe advanced sexual surrogacy sessions—” No. Better not risk putting that in there.

DR. NUKULYE hits the “Delete” key several times.

DR. NUKULYE, *Continued*,

What’s all this nonsense here? (*Thumbing through the Swanson file*) Oh yes, of course. The hypnosis business. That could be useful.

DR. NUKULYE begins to transfer the text from the Swanson file to JULIA’s file.

DR. NUKULYE, *Continued*

“I conducted hypnosis therapy to reinforce my original diagnosis of the patient—that of chronic depression and post-traumatic stress disorder directly traceable to the moment of sexual molestation. Subject has continued to live out the molestation scenario via her continued participation in abusive sexual relationships with narcissistic men, as is typical for many female incest survivors in which the father was the perpetrator, again reinforcing my initial diagnosis.” They’ll never be able to prove I didn’t do it, so that’s fine. (*Takes a moment to sit back and admire his work*) There. That’s done. Finally.

DR. NUKULYE picks up phone and dials.

Hello, Alistair? How are you? Oh, just fine, fine. Wonderful, in fact. I’m sorry to be calling so late. I was just calling to tell you that I’ve completed my board certification paper. I should be putting it before the committee tomorrow. Oh, I’m not worried about it. Should be a formality, nothing more. Yes, I’ll have my U.S. certification wrapped up in a matter of weeks. Yes, I did receive your letter. I think it’s jolly wonderful you want to set up a new surrogacy practice. Have you decided on the location yet? Malta. Well, that’s ideal. No regulations there whatsoever, and it’s just a skip from the Continent by plane. Not to mention a lovely vacation spot. What? You’re breaking up—I can’t hear you well. That’s better. No, I’m afraid I haven’t had the opportunity. I’m not sure I will get a chance. Well, yes, but she’s suspicious. I’ll keep you posted. But there’s nothing saying we can’t introduce tribal rituals into our Malta practice. Yes, I should be able to relocate there within a month or so. I’ll just have to see about tickets. It’s a great opportunity, Alistair. I look forward to it. Cheers.

DR. NUKULYE shuts his laptop and exits as LIGHTS FADE OUT.

ACT II: SCENE 11

AT RISE: JULIA is sitting at a café table alone, looking impatiently at her watch.

JULIA

God, where is she? It's late.

Enter THE LOVER.

THE LOVER

Hi there. Are you Julia?

JULIA

Yeah. Who are you?

THE LOVER

I'm your surrogate.

JULIA

You're a guy.

THE LOVER

That's right.

JULIA

You're not supposed to be a guy.

THE LOVER

I know. There's kind of a... thing about that.

JULIA

Is the whole world totally messed up, or is it just me?

THE LOVER

No no—everything's fine. It's not what you think.

JULIA

What exactly am I supposed to think?

THE LOVER

Well, I decided to come in my partner's place. So I can talk to you about some things.

JULIA

You have a partner?

THE LOVER

Yes. Sheila. You spoke to her on the phone, I believe.

JULIA

Oh, so you're not—oh.

THE LOVER

Sheila and I work together when—when we work.

JULIA

So you're—

THE LOVER

Our clientele is mostly bisexual S&M people. Some straight swingers, but not many.

JULIA

Uh-huh. And why would Dr. Nukulye be sending me to you?

THE LOVER

He used to be a client of ours, actually. I'm not really sure why he would have referred us to one of his patients, but he did. See, we're not really in that line of work.

JULIA

I see.

THE LOVER

But I know lots of great people who are in that line of work, if that's what you're looking for—

JULIA

No, no. That's OK. I'm not looking for that at all. Not at all.

THE LOVER

Really. Then why did you go to Dr. Nukulye in the first place?

JULIA

Well, because I have some really bad depression problems, and he's part of this free counseling service—

THE LOVER

(Sarcastically) Right.

JULIA

Is there a problem?

THE LOVER

Well, I only know him as a client, not as a psychiatrist, so I really can't speak to his abilities as a doctor—

JULIA

What are you saying?

THE LOVER

Well, the guy is a bit of a freak.

JULIA

Don't you specialize in freaks?

THE LOVER

Well, yeah, but even by my standards, this guy is a freak.

JULIA

What does he do?

THE LOVER

I'm not really at liberty to say—

JULIA

WHAT DOES HE DO???

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