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# *Shortages*

A Sex Comedy by

**Ruth Pearl**

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# Shortages

by Ruth Pearl

## CHARACTERS

ARNOLD SCHNEIDERMAN:

*HE is a fifty year old owner of a Cadillac showroom in New York City. HE used to commute daily to his home in the suburbs, but due to the gas shortage, HE now comes home only on weekends. His business, which was once good, is now failing. This undermines his confidence to such an extent that it affects his marriage. HE is beginning to feel that HE is getting old.*

SYLVIA SCHNEIDERMAN:

*SHE is a suburban housewife, who, ever since her daughter's college years and subsequent marriage, has become an empty nester. SHE is forty-six years old and has been experiencing a difficult menopause. A usually gregarious person, SHE has been confined to her house because SHE has been unable to get gas for her car. All week long SHE looks forward to ARNOLD'S visits and therefore becomes very distressed when HE does not give her the attention SHE craves.*

## SETTING

*Winter, 1974*

*The Kitchen of Arnold & Sylvia Schneiderman; their home in suburban New York*

### ACT I

SCENE 1: *Thanksgiving Day, late afternoon*

### ACT II

SCENE 1: *The next afternoon*

SCENE 2: *Early the next morning*

SCENE 3: *Two weeks later; mid-afternoon*

### ACT III

SCENE 1: *A week later; early evening.*

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## ACT I

### Scene 1

SETTING: *The kitchen in the home of ARNOLD and SYLVIA SCHNEIDERMAN is large and comfortable. A table with a small radio in the center is already set for dinner. A sweater is draped over one of the four chairs. Nearby are a deacon bench and ARNOLD'S desk and waste paper basket. Atop the long counter is a bottle of pills. Below and above it are the cabinets. There is also a sink, oven, refrigerator and a visible thermostat. Through the picture window in the rear wall we can see snow falling in large pellets on this very cold Thanksgiving Day. In addition to the entrance there are two other doors, one leading into a hallway and closet, the other into the basement stairway.*

AT RISE: *It is late afternoon. SYLVIA is wearing a sleeveless dress with an apron over it with two large pockets, each containing a handkerchief which she will pull out at various intervals. With her hands encased in oven mitts, SHE is about to open the oven when she hears a rattling at the entrance door. It swings open as ARNOLD comes sliding into the room, ushering in huge gusts of snow. HE glides right past her as HE struggles to close the door which is swinging backward with the wind. Although HE is covered with snow up to the hips, HE makes no attempt to remove his coat, hat and scarf. HE merely shakes off the excess by stomping in HIS boots, still holding onto the chair for support. Very carefully, HE sits down, holding out HIS feet.*

ARNOLD

Sylvia, take off my boots! Please!

*(HE drops his keys, pulls off his gloves which fall to the floor and blows on his red hands as SYLVIA removes her oven mitts and they too fall to the floor.)*

ARNOLD

That damn zipper! It's stuck again. Let me do it.

*(He rips the boot off. SHE helps him with the other.)*

Sylvia, I just made it! No more gas for the car!

SYLVIA

Arnold, are you all right? Your face is so red!

ARNOLD

It's frostbite, not high blood pressure.

SYLVIA

Who can tell?

*(ARNOLD crosses to hallway and disappears into it. We hear the closet door open and shut. HE comes back holding a pair of shoes, sits on chair, puts on one shoe, hobbles over to thermostat with the other foot on tiptoe.)*

ARNOLD

*(Shivering)*

What's the temperature in here?

SYLVIA

62...Last time I checked.

ARNOLD

When was that?

SYLVIA

The day you left. Monday morning.

ARNOLD

Just in case you're interested, the heat's out.

SYLVIA

Completely?

ARNOLD

Completely.

*(For the first time, HE really looks at her, enough to notice that SHE is wearing a sleeveless dress.)*

Aren't you cold?

SYLVIA

No.

ARNOLD

I'm freezing just looking at you. It's twenty degrees out there. No heat in the house and you walk around in a summer dress. Mashiga!

SYLVIA

Saving oil. Patriotic.

ARNOLD

Idiotic!

*(SHE picks up his boots, places them on newspaper, puts oven mitts on counter top near cabinets.)*

SYLVIA

I've always been very adaptable.

ARNOLD

I've come to one conclusion, Sylvia. We, you and I, have altogether different metabolisms.

SYLVIA

*(Laughing)*

Every woman and every man have altogether different metabolisms.

ARNOLD

All week, I'm away in the city because of this damn gas shortage and I get such a welcome that if I hadn't taken up hockey I would have broken my back just getting up the steps. *(Pause)* What's the matter? You forgot how to shovel?

SYLVIA

I can't shovel anymore. I was panting so hard I got palpitations. I was afraid I'd get heart failure.

ARNOLD

You got your sexes crossed; men get heart attacks from shoveling, not women.

SYLVIA

I didn't want to be the first statistic.

ARNOLD

At least sprinkle some salt. Kosher salt.

SYLVIA

We haven't had salt in this house for over three years, kosher or otherwise, ever since your last attack of gastritis.

ARNOLD

Put it on the shopping list.

SYLVIA

What shopping list? I haven't been out in days. No gas for my car, ever since the one gas station in this whole town has closed down. Gasoline is now as precious as gold.

ARNOLD

And just as costly.

SYLVIA

All this confinement, this snow. I can't even take a walk, only an airing.

ARNOLD

How do you get your airing?

SYLVIA

From the drafts.

ARNOLD

You hibernate and I go ice skating—all in the same room.

*(HE crosses to the phone which is on the wall near the hallway. HE picks it up ready to dial. SYLVIA, who has been following him, takes it out of his hand, puts it back in its cradle. HE looks at her questionably.)*

SYLVIA

Something's wrong with the phone.

ARNOLD

I can't call the oil company?

SYLVIA

No.

ARNOLD

Since when?

SYLVIA

Tuesday afternoon. It's not too bad though. We can't call anyone. But they can call us.

ARNOLD

For partial service, all they're going to get is partial payment. You must have been calling too many people out of town.

SYLVIA

Who's in town here? All the dead people across the street in the cemetery?

ARNOLD

Write letters.

SYLVIA

This town is so asleep, you can't get a letter delivered—you have to hike for it. A mile and a half to the post office. I can't walk so far. I got bunions.

ARNOLD

Am I asking you?... In the meantime, what do we do for oil?

SYLVIA

When my girlfriend Thelma called me Monday, I asked her to do me the favor of calling them.

ARNOLD

Who?

SYLVIA

The phone company.

ARNOLD

Where are they?

SYLVIA

They never called back.

ARNOLD

We don't need a telephone operator. We need a repairman.

*(HE crosses to window and looks out.)*

Look at it! A blizzard! A real blizzard! Looks more like snowballs than snowflakes. It's as though we're living in the Arctic Circle.

SYLVIA

Seems more like Pompeii.

ARNOLD

*(Rubbing his hands together)*

I'm going down the basement to look for that heater.

*(HE disappears behind Down R corner door. SYLVIA goes to oven. We hear a racket from the basement. Sylvia holds her ears.)*

ARNOLD

*(Hollering up to her)*

Where did you put the damn thing?

SYLVIA

*(Hollering down)*

Behind the humidifier, in front of the typewriter, close to the mirror, on top of the stove.

ARNOLD

*(Hollering down)*

This stove's an antique.

SYLVIA

Antique nothing. It's the latest.

*(ARNOLD brings the heater into the kitchen and SYLVIA wipes it with a corner of her apron. ARNOLD plugs it in and then sits down.)*

ARNOLD

No gas for the car, no oil for the furnace, a useless telephone...

SYLVIA

There's a phone booth about a mile away.

ARNOLD

Wild horses couldn't drive me out of this cold house into that snow again...

*(HE sneezes.)*

My teeth are chattering so much I won't be able to chew.

SYLVIA

You won't have to do much chewing tonight. Nothing strenuous anyway.

ARNOLD

You can't very well tackle a drumstick of a turkey without a fair amount of chewing.

SYLVIA

Turkey isn't on the menu.

ARNOLD

No turkey on Thanksgiving? We always have turkey on Thanksgiving.

SYLVIA

They were all gone.

ARNOLD

What are we going to eat?

SYLVIA

Crackers and tea. With peanut butter and jelly.

*(SHE goes to the cabinet, gets her diet scale and the crackers, the peanut butter and the jelly and brings them to the table, starts making sandwiches for ARNOLD. Intermittently, SHE dabs her face and neck with her handkerchief, sighing deeply. HE doesn't seem to notice. SHE weighs half a sandwich for herself, takes off the excess peanut butter and puts it on her plate. SHE wipes herself again, this time more furiously. SHE then X to the counter and picks up a bottle of pills and examines them carefully. ARNOLD notices the pills for the first time.)*

ARNOLD

Diet pills?

SYLVIA

No... I trudged through the snow, schlepping that old wagon the two long miles to the supermarket, me with me enlarged bunions.

ARNOLD

For crackers and tea? What's in the oven?

SYLVIA

Bread. Can't you smell it?

ARNOLD

When you get older, everything slows down, including the sense of smell. I was sure you had a turkey in there.

SYLVIA

The hoarders were at it again, carting them away because of a little rumor that there may be some scarcities because of the gas shortage. I kept bumping into men, women and even children loaded down with food... I met a woman in the store who told me that

SYLVIA *Continued*

someone else told her that the reason all the turkeys were gone is because the banks are renting out freezer vaults.

ARNOLD

Nu? Why didn't you fill up like the rest of them?

SYLVIA

It's not right. Some people are going to be awfully hungry.

ARNOLD

Yeah, like us. On Thanksgiving.

SYLVIA

I don't really mind.

ARNOLD

You like starving?

SYLVIA

We're not starving.

ARNOLD

No? It's almost like Yom Kippur.

SYLVIA

It just makes dieting that much easier.

ARNOLD

Couldn't you find anything a little more appetizing?

SYLVIA

I never dreamed I'd walk into a supermarket and see rows and rows of empty shelves, not even the necessities like soap, tissues. Arnold, we're living in frightening times.

ARNOLD

I passed a lot of food stores on the way home but I was terrified of stopping.

SYLVIA

What have they been doing to you in the city?

ARNOLD

I was afraid that if I went in, I wouldn't be able to come home. With all those gas swipers, I'm seriously thinking about hiring a sitter—for the car.

ARNOLD *Continued*

*(HE looks down at his food)*

Part of the pleasure in eating is the anticipation. Tonight there is nothing to anticipate, except indigestion.

*(SYLVIA dabs herself with a handkerchief. SHE has become increasingly uncomfortable.)*

SYLVIA

How's the car business?

ARNOLD

*(HE holds his head.)*

Don't ask.

SYLVIA

Is it that bad?

ARNOLD

Worse.

SYLVIA

How?

ARNOLD

I'd rather not talk...I let the two men go.

SYLVIA

Where?

ARNOLD

How do I know where they went? I couldn't pay them anymore. They were making more than me—the boss. And what were they doing? Polishing brand new cars that nobody wants.

SYLVIA

And to think that you used to make such good money.

ARNOLD

All money is good. Only business is bad....I made two sales this week and they both came back for their deposits. Nobody wants cars anymore. They'd rather swap their kids bikes...I ordered a two-seater.

SYLVIA

I can't ride. I'm imbalanced.

ARNOLD

You won't have to do a thing. I'll do all the pumping.

SYLVIA

*(After a pause)*

Is it true that jogging is out?

ARNOLD

They're too worn out just walking... This gas shortage is forcing me to pay not only the mortgage but a high rent for a cockroach infested four-story walk-up in the city that I can't even afford. I'm a weekend visitor in my own home.

SYLVIA

And I'm a weekday widow.

*(Pause)*

And Miss Silverman. Did you let her go too?

ARNOLD

Not yet. She doesn't know it yet.

SYLVIA

When?

ARNOLD

Her notice is in the mail. Since the mail is so slow because of the gas shortage, I'm hoping that it reaches her after the Thanksgiving holiday weekend. I didn't have the heart to tell her to her face that I wouldn't be needing her anymore.

SYLVIA

Why didn't you have the heart?

ARNOLD

Sentimental reasons.

SYLVIA

You feel sentimental about Miss Silverman?

ARNOLD

She may be a lousy typist, but she's a very nice person. She's been with me ever since I opened up.

SYLVIA

For fourteen years you've thought she was a very nice person?

ARNOLD

Absolutely.

SYLVIA

You've proved it. By sending her flowers every time she goes to the hospital. In fourteen years you've sent her three bouquets of flowers and how many have you sent me?

ARNOLD

But you only went to the hospital once to have Mary Lynn ... She's like a shipmate going down with the captain on a sinking ship.

SYLVIA

A mate?

*(SHE has difficulty swallowing. SHE seems to be sweating as she dabs her face and neck with her handkerchief.)*

ARNOLD

*(After a pause)*

What do you hear from Mary Lynn?

SYLVIA

She's all prepared.

ARNOLD

For what?

SYLVIA

To deliver the baby herself.

ARNOLD

This gas shortage is making everybody crazy. Now it's jeopardizing the life of our unborn grandchild, to say nothing of the safety of our only child. They should make special allowances for pregnant women.

SYLVIA

I understand it's under consideration...She believes in natural childbirth. Feels that if the Indians can do it, so can she.

ARNOLD

She's not an Indian.

SYLVIA

She's studying this book, *The Technique of Natural Childbirth*. If she does it right, she can always become a midwife.

ARNOLD

And if she does it wrong?

*(SHE makes a broad gesture with her arms indicating that that would be calamitous. SHE then opens the window. Snow falls into the room. ARNOLD, feeling the cold air, rushes to it, closes it. HE looks at SYLVIA as though SHE is demented.)*

ARNOLD

Why did you do a crazy thing like that?

SYLVIA

I wanted some fresh air. I just can't seem to get cool enough. It's awfully stuffy in here with that heater going.

*(SHE holds her heart.)*

ARNOLD

Your heart now.

SYLVIA

It's palpitating with palpitations.

ARNOLD

You're sick. If the phone was working, I'd call an ambulance, blizzard and all.

SYLVIA

Arnold, close the window. It's awfully cold in here. Please get my sweater.

*(He closes the window, runs for her sweater, helps her into it. SHE starts to shiver.)*

ARNOLD

You better get to bed. You must have caught that virus V. They claim it's very catching.

SYLVIA

Who can I catch it from? Isolated as I am out here. Whatever I have it's nothing to get alarmed about.

ARNOLD

You have your opinion and I have mine.

SYLVIA

If you'll be quiet for a minute, I'll try to explain.

ARNOLD

I'm quiet.

SYLVIA

It's all very normal.

ARNOLD

Normal?

SYLVIA

Under the circumstances.

ARNOLD

What circumstances?

SYLVIA

I'm in my changes, my very changeable changes.

ARNOLD

I'll say.

SYLVIA

For a long time, I've suspected it but two weeks ago it was almost confirmed.

ARNOLD

Almost?

SYLVIA

When a doctor is making a diagnosis, he or she must always leave some room for doubt. At least that's the way I interpret it.

ARNOLD

They're supposed to interpret—not you. You mean you've been seeing a doctor and you never let on a word?

*(SYLVIA nods her head.)*

ARNOLD

How did you get there?

SYLVIA

My girlfriend Thelma. Don't ask me how her son always manages to get gas.

ARNOLD

Black market.

SYLVIA

She got him to take me into the city.

ARNOLD

And you never let on. You could have called me. We could have had lunch together.

SYLVIA

He's her doctor. She's been going to him for years. She's a very sick woman. Keeps getting worse and worse. When I told him I was suffering from menopause, he said there was no such thing.

ARNOLD

You told *him*? Wasn't he supposed to tell *you*?

SYLVIA

I went to him for relief of my symptoms, that's all. At first, he said it was all imaginary even though I had a flush right in his office, the sweat pouring out of me. He denied that it had anything to do with my condition. Said that it was all due to the gas shortage because I'm forced to stay home so much. Called it agoraphobia—housewives disease—and said that there's been an epidemic among women, even young women who, after being used to driving all over, have to be content with not going anyplace. And he predicts that even when this gas shortage ends and we'll all have plenty of gas for our cars we will be afraid to leave our homes. He claims this is what I have in its early stages—agoraphobia. It's a complete reversal of mind over matter.

ARNOLD

Judging by your reaction a little while ago, I'd say he was 1000% wrong.

SYLVIA

That's exactly how I felt so I did what I had to do.

ARNOLD

What?

SYLVIA

Went to a much more sympathetic, understanding doctor.

ARNOLD

Who?

SYLVIA

A woman.

ARNOLD

A woman?

SYLVIA

An endocrinologist, a gland specialist. who told me that men doctors usually don't believe that women suffer from what she believes is a real condition, having experienced it herself. Gave me some hormone pills.

ARNOLD

Where are they?

*(SHE crosses to the cabinet, takes out a bottle of pills, places them on counter.)*

SYLVIA

Right here. I keep them close by because they give me a feeling of security.

ARNOLD

How did you get to this woman specialist?

SYLVIA

She was in the same building as the other one.

*(HE picks up bottle of pills.)*

ARNOLD

Have you ever taken these?

SYLVIA

No.

ARNOLD

Why not?

SYLVIA

She's a very honest woman. Puts it right on the line. If you had heard her go on about all the possible side affects you wouldn't be so anxious for me to take them either. For one thing, they make you gain weight.

ARNOLD

And you with all your dieting.

SYLVIA

Said I'm almost certain to get headaches, possibly high blood pressure and—

ARNOLD

Something else?

SYLVIA

I stand a strong chance of developing my own reactions which she can't predict because they're so-so individualistic.

ARNOLD

I still feel you should have called me when you were in the city and told me about it.

SYLVIA

No woman in her right mind wants to remind her husband that she's reached the age of menopause—that she's getting older, especially since he's getting still older. She said that emotional upsets bring on the flushes more frequently. Being confined like this doesn't help me. There are times when I feel like the female version of the reincarnation of Robinson Crusoe.

ARNOLD

Read the newspapers, books.

SYLVIA

Whoever said that books are our greatest companions is a liar. Newspapers, the last article I read explained why a prominent psychiatrist was writing up a case history proving that the entire city is suffering from a nervous breakdown.

ARNOLD

The radio, television.

SYLVIA

That's all I hear, shortages. All I know. The comedians. Even they don't let you forget it. It's so depressing....I think I know what brought this attack on.

*(ARNOLD looks at her questioningly. The phone rings. SHE picks it up.)*

*(On phone)*

Hello. Mary Lynn. What's the matter, darling? You sound weak.

*(To ARNOLD)*

Our baby is in labor.

*(ARNOLD comes to the phone, listens.)*

ARNOLD

What?

*(SYLVIA, still on phone, talks to ARNOLD.)*

SYLVIA

She says she can't find the book.

ARNOLD

What book?

SYLVIA

The one I was telling you about, the one the doctor gave her, *The Technique of Natural Childbirth*.

ARNOLD

*(On phone)*

Lynnie, did you read it? It shouldn't make you nauseous. Of course, we'll wait.

*(SYLVIA, alarmed, takes the phone from him.)*

SYLVIA

Darling, can you hear me?

*(To ARNOLD)*

She's not on the line. We've been cut off. Now, we don't even know what's happening to her.

ARNOLD

She's having a contraction. She put the phone down. What's so terrible?

SYLVIA

*(Into phone)*

Are you there? Good. Did you call the doctor? When does he get back from his vacation? Call the police station. They deliver babies. Nothing to be embarrassed about. Tell them to send over a policewoman. What? Again?

*(To ARNOLD)*

She hung up. I think she's having another contraction.

ARNOLD

Why did you tell her to call the police?

SYLVIA

Because the doctor who is filling in for the one who's on vacation lives too far from the hospital to ever get there in time and he doesn't think he can get the gas so he told her to

SYLVIA *Continued*

go according to the book since it was given to her for just this kind of emergency. But she didn't really read it that thoroughly to understand it; she prefers to get in touch with the police.

ARNOLD

It won't do her any good. They are cooperating with the government by going back to horseback riding, just like the old days. There has even been a reduction in crime since there can be no more fast getaways.

SYLVIA

My poor little girl. She's going to become a mother.

ARNOLD

What are you crying for? Last time you were crying because she couldn't conceive. You gave them no peace until they were examined by no less than five doctors, until they found someone who could help them.

SYLVIA

I can't think of anything but my baby having a baby. I'm so forgetful I can't remember from one minute to the next. That woman doctor said it's all part of it. She said some other things too. Important things.

ARNOLD

Like what?

SYLVIA

I can't remember...And another symptom is my legs.

ARNOLD

*(Lifting her skirt, looking at them)*

They seem all right to me.

SYLVIA

They get weak every once in a while when I least expect it. Why just this morning I fell up the stairs.

ARNOLD

Fell up?

SYLVIA

I fell down as I was going up.

*(HE ponders this.)*

ARNOLD

Wasn't there something else you were going to tell me when the phone rang?

SYLVIA

I think I had better not tell you.

ARNOLD

Since when have you gotten so secretive?

SYLVIA

Last night, late, very late.

ARNOLD

How late?

SYLVIA

Eleven, eleven-thirty, quarter of twelve, I was startled by a knock on the door.

ARNOLD

Which door?

SYLVIA

Sounded like someone was knocking at the refrigerator door. ..So naturally I ignored it. But then, when it grew louder, I couldn't deny it any longer. Someone was knocking at the front door. Nobody knocks in the daytime. Phone calls I get plenty. Visitors, nobody.

ARNOLD

Who was it?

SYLVIA

A man.

ARNOLD

With me away in the city? What did you do?

SYLVIA

I tried to pretend that no one was home, but I didn't pull it off too well, what with the light on, the TV blasting away.

ARNOLD

I've always warned you never to open a door to a stranger, especially at night.

SYLVIA

He kept knocking and I kept shaking.

ARNOLD

That's why I bought the revolver for just such emergencies. Right there in the drawer. With me away so much it's your best protection.

SYLVIA

I wouldn't use that thing except in self-defense. I'm not even sure I could do that. The thought of it gives me goose pimples. Please put in the drawer.

ARNOLD

Look at it. Don't be afraid to look at it.

*(HE comes towards her with the gun. SHE jumps away.)*

SYLVIA

Please put it away. I already looked at it.

*(HE is now very close to her. SHE is backing away.)*

ARNOLD

Don't be afraid of it. Here—touch it.

*(HE tries to grab her hand, but SHE is too quick for him.)*

How are you ever going to use it if you won't even look at it, let alone touch it?

*(SHE makes a conscious effort to conquer her fear and repugnance of it, steps closer to it. HE takes her hand, places it on the gun. For a moment, she looks away, then recovers herself, looks boldly at her hand on the gun.)*

It's only metal. You pull the trigger like this.

*(HE takes it from her, points it at her. SHE jumps away, more frightened than before.)*

I'm only demonstrating. Only demonstrating. *(HE holds it pointing downward.)* So—what happened?

SYLVIA

When I didn't answer, he hollered out that he knew someone was there because he saw my shadow through the window shade.

ARNOLD

That nervy bastard! Did he?

SYLVIA

When I went to lower the shade. Said he had run out of gas. Wanted to call his wife. Did you happen to see a stalled car as you came up before?

ARNOLD

There were so many I couldn't keep track.

SYLVIA

Then it was true. I'm a mean, selfish woman.

ARNOLD

If you had let him in, he still couldn't have used the phone because it was suffering from some peculiar malady of the wires. But suppose you had let him in and the phone was working and he had called his wife and she really wanted to get him but was out of gas. Do you realize what a thing like this could have meant? ...He would have had to spend the night under our roof, you and a strange man, here, alone, together, at midnight.

SYLVIA

You're jealous!

*(The phone rings. SHE springs after it. ARNOLD'S eyes are on her as HE listens expectantly.)*

SYLVIA

*(On phone)*

Hello. Yes. Yes. Call me as soon as it's over. Please.

*(SHE hangs up.)*

That was his mother, Etta. Charlie's mother. Because of the gas shortage, a neighbor, an elderly woman who once long ago delivered a baby, who thinks of herself as a midwife, is preparing to deliver the baby.

ARNOLD

It beats Mary Lynn reading a book at the same time as she's giving birth. Miss Silverman's sister-in-law is a midwife and she's supposed to be better than the doctors.

SYLVIA

Miss Silverman, Miss Silverman, Miss Silverman—Everything Miss Silverman.

*(SHE wipes her face and neck, gets up and crosses to the window, tries to open it. HE rushes to her aid.)*

SYLVIA

Air! Arnold! Air!

*(HE opens the window very wide, gets the bottle of pills and a glass of water. HE gives her one handful then another. SHE has difficulty gulping them down.)*

ARNOLD

Here-take some more!

*(BLACKOUT)*

END OF SCENE 1

## ACT II

### Scene 1

SETTING: It is still snowing. The room has become increasingly warmer. It is the next afternoon.

AT RISE: *ARNOLD is at his desk involved in paper work. He is wearing a heavy sweater. SYLVIA, wearing the same sleeveless dress, seems unusually restless. SHE picks up a newspaper, sits down, glances at it, tosses it aside. SHE fumbles with the radio dial and flicks from station to station stopping at the news announcer's VOICE.*

#### RADIO VOICE

Americans from all walks of life are feeling the pinch of the shortages—even to the extent of affecting their sex lives. Courting couples are reported to be shacking up through necessity. A Brooklyn man planned to sleep on the floor of the factory where he works. When a call to his wife proved unconvincing, the distraught husband walked the 30 miles from factory to house only to be greeted by an irate spouse with a gun. He is miraculously recovering from a near-fatal head wound in King's County Hospital. Inflation is forcing millions of Americans into debt. Unemployment continues to increase as taxes go up. Rickshaws are being built by the thousands as young able-bodied men offer their services as coolies to the grateful elderly. Economists are predicting that balloon travel will reach unprecedented heights in the near future. And now back to our music.

*(ARNOLD turns off the radio. SHE paces back and forth, looks out of the window, sighs, eats candies from dish on table. SHE looks despairingly from time to time at ARNOLD who is totally oblivious of her. SHE starts to sing a romantic song from their courtship days, "I'll Never Smile Again", completely off-key.)*

#### ARNOLD

How am I supposed to concentrate with you howling in my ear? Now I have to start all over again. A guy can't even add up figures in his own home.

#### SYLVIA

I remember a time when you used to make me promise never to stop singing that song.

ARNOLD

What a young man says should never be held against him in middle life. It's an unfair balance of powers.

SYLVIA

I'm trying not to think of Mary Lynn—poor laboring kid so far away from her mother.

ARNOLD

For God's sake, will you please be quiet?

SYLVIA

All week I'm alone. Naturally a wife looks forward to a little companionship, a little—

ARNOLD

Quiet.

SYLVIA

All right. I'll sit quietly and pretend that you're not here. But there's one problem.

*(HE goes on working, not listening.)*

When I'm alone, at least I can put on the TV, the radio, the stereo--but with you here, I'm not allowed.

*(SHE picks up a deck of cards from the table, intending to play solitaire.)*

SYLVIA

I feel like a widow beside her husband, the corpse.

*(ARNOLD mutters something to himself, counts, seems troubled. HE angrily tears up papers HE had been figuring on, throws them into the wastepaper basket. HE gets up and strides over to SYLVIA who is busily laying out the cards.)*

ARNOLD

Sylvia.

SYLVIA

Yes.

ARNOLD

Sometimes a husband must call upon his wife to make certain sacrifices.

SYLVIA

More sacrifices? Ever since the shortages, my life has been one sacrifice after another.

ARNOLD

I'm sorry.

SYLVIA

I'm sorrier.

ARNOLD

What I'm asking is really very little.

SYLVIA

Since it's so little, let's forget it.

ARNOLD

It's not that little.

SYLVIA

Oh.

ARNOLD

During our twenty-five years of marriage, I've given you little trinkets, symbols of my affection, my generosity; now as a symbol of your affection, your generosity, I'm asking you to return them.

SYLVIA

Business is that bad?

*(HE nods his head.)*

Without my rings, my watches, my bracelets, my pins, my necklaces I'd feel naked. And the more dressed up I'd be, the more naked I'd feel.

ARNOLD

You haven't worn them for weeks.

SYLVIA

Where do I go? Shut up in this house?

*(THEY are both standing near the table. HE takes her left hand in his. At his touch, SHE throws her arms around him. HE is so overwhelmed by this unexpected reaction that he puts his arms up in an effort to break away.)*

ARNOLD

What's gotten into you?

SYLVIA

You touched me. You really touched me.

ARNOLD

It's as though I've touched off a volcano.

SYLVIA

It's been so long. Over two months.

*(SHE clings to him.)*

ARNOLD

You keep score?

*(As SHE clings to him, HE again reaches for her left hand and carefully slides off her wedding ring and engagement ring. SHE wrenches herself free.)*

SYLVIA

You've snatched my rings.

ARNOLD

We know we're married.

SYLVIA

Do we?

*(SHE touches her empty fingers, turns from him, almost talking to herself.)*

Remember that little engagement ring you bought for me for five dollars and the wedding band for ten that we picked out at the five and dime? How happy we were! Young, foolish and in love. You vowed that someday you would give me real diamonds. It took eleven years but you got them for me....And tomorrow morning when I look in my closet, my furs will be gone too.

*(HE puts the rings in his pocket.)*

ARNOLD

Keep the furs.

SYLVIA

Arnold.

ARNOLD

For the time being.

SYLVIA

Arnold!

ARNOLD

I've always hated Indian givers. I'm sorry.

SYLVIA

For what?

ARNOLD

A lot of things.

*(The phone rings.)*

SYLVIA

Hello. Yes, he's here. Who's calling please? Miss Silverman?

*(Her hand is over the mouthpiece before SHE gives the phone to ARNOLD.)*

Miss Silverman, Miss Silverman, Miss Silverman. Everything Miss Silverman.

ARNOLD

*(On phone)*

Hello dear.

*(SYLVIA is suddenly perspiring profusely, wiping herself with her handkerchief.)*

I'm sorry, but we won't be seeing each other anymore. I like you very much too. Yes, I promise to think of you every day. Don't cry. Of course, I feel sad. I'll give you a very good referral. Typing isn't everything. You're loyal, trustworthy, punctual. Sure. Sure. We'll keep in touch. Good bye Miss Silverman.

SYLVIA

*(Sarcastically)*

Keep in touch, by all means, naturally such very good friends.

ARNOLD

*(Laughing)*

You can't be jealous of plain Miss Silverman.

SYLVIA

You're only pretending you find her plain.

ARNOLD

Why should I pretend?

SYLVIA

Ever since you started staying in the city two months ago at that hotel and were coming home just on weekends you two—

ARNOLD

We are very good friends and nothing more.

SYLVIA

Then why did you stop coming home every night like you used to?

ARNOLD

I thought I had explained that to you. The long trip, with the snow and ice and hardly any gas.

SYLVIA

And even before that, the coming home so late.

ARNOLD

The snow and ice.

SYLVIA

You know very well what you are to each other.

ARNOLD

What are we to each other?

*(There is a silence during which they both eye each other.)*

SYLVIA

You can't fool me.

ARNOLD

As I live and breathe, the only times we've been alone together were the few times since I was forced to let Fred and George go.

SYLVIA

You can't deny that you've had lunch together.

ARNOLD

I sent out for lunch; we ate at the store, she at her desk, I at mine . . . I've been driving her to work every morning, but it doesn't mean a thing.

SYLVIA

Such very good friends.

ARNOLD

Because she only lives a block away from me.

SYLVIA

How convenient. She must have found it for you.

ARNOLD

She did.

SYLVIA

I know all about these emancipated career women, how they lead fuller lives than those of us who are married ... And at night I suppose you drive her home.

ARNOLD

Only when she stays late.

SYLVIA

She stays late?

ARNOLD

Not very often.

SYLVIA

She stays late and you drive her home and she only lives a block away.

ARNOLD

It's only to save on gas. The State Department of Transportation discourages people from driving alone—it's just a waste of gas. Very unpatriotic. Since the price of gas is so high, everybody has been doubling up.

SYLVIA

Of course, double up. I understand perfectly. Especially since a man doesn't touch his own wife in two months. It—it—usually means that he has his hands all over some other woman.

ARNOLD

When a man gets older, he loses his hair, his teeth, his sense of smell, his—everything goes down. A very natural process.

SYLVIA

A very unnatural process. Arnold, what are you trying to tell me?

ARNOLD

I have no desire.

SYLVIA

Why don't you finish your sentence?

ARNOLD

I am finished. Sentenced to no desire.

SYLVIA

We have no communication, verbal or otherwise. I meant finish your sentence.

ARNOLD

I did finish.

SYLVIA

Go ahead and say it—you have no desire for me.

ARNOLD

I didn't say that.

SYLVIA

You thought it.

ARNOLD

Since when do you hear my thoughts? Thoughts I haven't even formed in my head.

SYLVIA

I don't let myself go like other women. I've been extremely careful, counting calories, especially now that the food shortages turned out to be only a rumor and the shelves are packed full again, temptation all around me. But you don't go for me and there's nothing I can do about it.

ARNOLD

I *do* go for you.

SYLVIA

You don't lust after me—not one bit. When a woman is married to a man who has ceased lusting after her, she has failed as a wife.

ARNOLD

It is I who has failed as a husband.

SYLVIA

We are both failures; you have no desire and I have no appeal.

ARNOLD

There is no other woman in this whole world who has ever appealed to me more than you do at this very moment.

SYLVIA

Then why can't I fill you with desire?

ARNOLD

I didn't think you minded.

SYLVIA

I didn't, not too much, not until last night. It all started after you gave me the hormone pills. I'm really too embarrassed to tell you.

ARNOLD

Too embarrassed to tell your own husband?

SYLVIA

I've had a personal reaction which turned out to be very individualistic.

ARNOLD

Are you sure it's from the pills?

*(SHE covers her face with her hands.)*

SYLVIA

They've—they've made me, oh, Arnold I'm so ashamed of myself. I never in my whole life ever dreamed I'd be in such a position, such a well-brought up girl that I was—a wife who always prided herself on being satisfied with so little, and now the pills have ruined everything. You never should have given them to me, especially since I had just told you about the possible side effects.

ARNOLD

What should I have done? Just let you keep screaming for air? The hot flushes are gone. There's *something* to those pills.

SYLVIA

There sure is. Arnold, what are we going to do? You're finished and I'm—

*(HE paces, seems distraught.)*

ARNOLD

How is a man supposed to feel sexy when he's on the brink of bankruptcy?

SYLVIA

I didn't know. I didn't realize.

ARNOLD

No one wants Cadillacs anymore. Including me. Mine rusts in the garage while I ride around in a second hand 69 Dodge because it uses less gas. It's all very confusing. What was once expensive is now cheap, what was once cheap is now expensive. And do you know what really broke me?

SYLVIA

No.

ARNOLD

Ambitious idiot that I am – I had to order two hundred brand new Cadillacs – gas consuming monsters that they are, and the manufacturer refuses, absolutely refuses to take them back. A showroom full of beautiful Cadillacs and I'm wondering how much it will cost to have them junked.

SYLVIA

No wonder the junkmen are so rich.

ARNOLD

Cars! I should have stuck with pinball machines.

SYLVIA

I knew there was something I meant to tell you, but I kept forgetting. I finally got a real estate man to look at the house.

ARNOLD

Yeah?

SYLVIA

Said we'd be lucky to get sixty thousand.

ARNOLD

Three years ago we paid a hundred thousand. It couldn't have depreciated forty-thousand dollars. It's-why-it's preposterous!

SYLVIA

Neighbors, we don't have.

ARNOLD

Privacy, that's what we paid for.

SYLVIA

It's a buyer's market. Seems there are a lot of houses like ours way out in the sticks. That's exactly the way he described it, and people are avoiding them like the plague for the duration of the shortages, which could be forever.

ARNOLD

We have fifty-eight thousand sunk into this house and now you tell me we have a good chance of losing it? With business like it is—I don't know what to do. We should never have bought it. We don't need this great big house. I have an office, a study, you have a sewing room, a sitting room. We never use them; we're always in here, in the kitchen. It's the same all year 'round. It was a costly mistake building that patio, screening it. On the hottest days, we still sit here with the fan blowing in the hot breezes.

SYLVIA

What can I tell you? It must be because we are just plain kitchen people. It's the way we were brought up. Rich people are separated by so many walls. No wonder they were the first to start with the divorces. With their private terraces, private balconies, private bedrooms, private bathrooms. Poverty may have its drawbacks but it sure pulls people together. That's why I'm not afraid to be poor again. If worse comes to worse, we could always live with Mary Lynn.

ARNOLD

In the mid-west? No thank-you. I'd never understand the language. And I'm not accepting charity, especially from a son-in-law.

SYLVIA

Even before Mary Lynn was old enough to go to kindergarten I paid extra so that she could go to nursery school freeing me to work for Mr. Penny over at that stinking foundry. I started out as a secretary or so he said; by the time I left I was the best ore smelter in the whole place and the only female. It was all to help you get started in the car business. Now I see it was all for nothing.

*(ARNOLD takes out a cigarette.)*

SYLVIA

You're smoking.

ARNOLD

I know I'm smoking.

SYLVIA

But you got a gold medal from Smoke Enders for excellence in abstinence.

ARNOLD

A man's got to do something. Statistics prove that more men die from underwork than overwork.

SYLVIA

You're a wise man, Arnold.

ARNOLD

Me? Wise? A failure like me?

SYLVIA

And I'm the foolish one. I always advised you against carrying all that insurance, but you, wise man that you are, never listened.

ARNOLD

That's right-my insurance policies! I was so upset I didn't even think of them.

*(HE crosses to desk, takes out policies. SHE is nearby.)*

ARNOLD

Here's the mortgage insurance.

SYLVIA

At least it will be paid.

ARNOLD

It will not.

SYLVIA

Didn't you keep up the payments?

ARNOLD

I certainly did.

SYLVIA

Well?

ARNOLD

It's only good in case of serious accidents – or long illnesses. You have to be pretty far gone to get a cent from some of these insurance companies, but that doesn't stop them from raising the premiums.

SYLVIA

Bankruptcy isn't covered?

ARNOLD

Is it an accident? A serious illness?

SYLVIA

It's a dilemma, a catastrophe.

ARNOLD

That leaves only my insurance—my life insurance policy which we'll have to turn into cash.

SYLVIA

Then, we'll be insurance-less. At our age. A worrisome situation.

ARNOLD

It's your own fault.

SYLVIA

What did I do?

ARNOLD

It's what you didn't do. Not letting me take out a life insurance policy on you.

SYLVIA

I can't help feeling superstitious about such things.

ARNOLD

If every woman suddenly dropped dead because her husband took out a policy in her name—

SYLVIA

My mother was the same—until my father talked her into it, and sure enough she almost dropped dead three weeks later right in the middle of making a payment.

ARNOLD

Coincidence.

SYLVIA

That's too simple an explanation... You could look for a job.

ARNOLD

In today's market?

SYLVIA

Maybe you should lie about your age.

ARNOLD

They think I'm lying when I tell them the truth. I'm only fifty; can I help it if I look five years older? Meanwhile we've got to cut down on everything...I've been working ever since I've been seven years old. Child labor laws never caught up with me. Shoeshine boy, paper boy, delivery boy, you name it. I never played after school. Football, baseball. Who had time for them?

SYLVIA

And girls? You never had time for girls either, did you Arnold?

ARNOLD

I was too busy making money. God, we were poor! My father, no matter what he did, never found himself. He died still looking.

SYLVIA

I used to feel flattered. I was your only girl. If I hadn't been so available, right next to you in the movies that rainy Saturday afternoon when Herb Greenstein introduced us, you wouldn't have married me. It's crazy, now that you have the time, you have no desire. Got married 8 o'clock Sunday night. By the time I woke up Monday morning, the bed was cold and you were gone.

ARNOLD

You were sleeping so soundly, I didn't want to awake you. Besides, you knew I was going to work.

SYLVIA

On her wedding morning, a bride can hardly think her groom considerate if he doesn't have the gumption to break her sleep. I'll never forget our – my wedding breakfast with only your picture to console me. Now, twenty-five years later, we're locked together and it's too late. Oh, Arnold, I'm so embarrassed, so ashamed.

*(Again, SHE covers her face, this time with a soft moan.)*

ARNOLD

What the Hell did they put into those pills?

*(HE crosses to the cabinet, picks them up. He reads the label.)*

Take one pill every three hours until symptoms subside. Man-made female hormone pills....Oy vey! Oh, my God!

SYLVIA

What's the matter?

ARNOLD

I gave you an overdose.

SYLVIA

How many?

ARNOLD

How should I know? I saw you struggling. I was so concerned I didn't stop to count.

SYLVIA

You could have killed me.

ARNOLD

Why didn't you stop me?

SYLVIA

My legs went weak under me. It's a wonder I didn't collapse. I was in no condition to count. ..Now I know why I am experiencing such a reaction. For all we know you might have turned me into a nymphomaniac.

ARNOLD

She's mined our relationship, that lady-quack.

SYLVIA

She's not a quack, she's Chief of Obstetrics and Gynecology in one of the city's largest hospitals, a professor at—

ARNOLD

Even the effects of LSD take several hours to wear off. Look what she's done to us!

SYLVIA

Let's sit down and talk about this calmly.

*(SHE leads him to the bench.)*

First of all, let's be honest with each other. We have never had a real sexual discussion.

ARNOLD

Until now, it wasn't necessary. We were getting along fine.

SYLVIA

We were not getting along fine. We were two rapidly aging people whose sex lives had practically dwindled down to nothing.

ARNOLD

But we didn't mind.

SYLVIA

It wasn't right. We shouldn't have stopped.

ARNOLD

Suppose a man doesn't know how to start up again. This woman doctor ought to be sued. No wonder malpractice is skyrocketing them right out of the business. Monkeying around with people's glands.

SYLVIA

Maybe she did us a favor.

ARNOLD

A favor?

SYLVIA

Proved that something is wrong with our marriage.

ARNOLD

I love you.

SYLVIA

Seems love has its limitations. You can't love me very passionately.

ARNOLD

You want me to take the hormone pills too?

SYLVIA

I can't see why we should continue to make each other miserable when sex clinics are springing up all over.

ARNOLD

A sex clinic? You want us, oldsters that we are, to go to a sex clinic?

SYLVIA

We need help! We need help! We obviously can't do it alone.

ARNOLD

How much?

SYLVIA

Considering what they do for you, it's cheap.

ARNOLD

How cheap?

SYLVIA

I don't know exactly.

ARNOLD

We can't afford it!

SYLVIA

For the first time in the history of mankind and womankind, happiness is for sale. Think of all the men and women who have called it the gift of pricelessness.

ARNOLD

We can't afford it.

SYLVIA

We can't afford happiness?

ARNOLD

Not right now.

SYLVIA

It has to be right now—while we're both able to stand on our own two feet.

ARNOLD

I'm worried about how I'm going to keep up expenses and you want us off chasing rainbows.

SYLVIA

But Arnold, we need help!

*(SHE puts her arms around him as SHE pushes him down on the bench, passionately abandoning herself. HE tries to break away. SHE persists.)*

ARNOLD

OK! OK! Call him! Call him!

*(BLACKOUT)*

END OF SCENE 1

## ACT II

### Scene 2

SETTING: *It is early the next morning. SYLVIA has been up for hours drinking tea. On the table is a box of tea. There is also a saucer filled with discarded teabags. A radio is on the table.*

AT RISE: *SYLVIA is wearing a heavy robe and slippers as she sits at the table sipping another cup of tea as she listens to the radio.*

#### RADIO VOICE

At the tone, it will be 6:00AM. And now for our weather report. This is Jeff Peterkins with our weather report for the Saturday following our Thanksgiving festivities. Now that the rain has almost washed away all traces of the snow, we can safely look forward to a day alternately mixed between sun and rain with temperatures hovering in the 30 degree range.

Because of the embargo, the President is encouraging citizens to adjust their thermostats to low, low temperatures matching those of the White House.

Due to a ten minute power shortage, five prominent psychiatrists who were trapped in an elevator are being treated for a panic disorder at an undisclosed major hospital and they are—

*(The phone rings. SHE jumps up, turns off the radio, then speaks into phone.)*

#### SYLVIA

Etta? It's about time you called! I was up all night waiting. Well, what is it? How's my baby? *My baby, Mary Lynn.*

*(ARNOLD enters, still tying his robe.)*

Is it a boy or a girl? Why can't you hear me? ....What kind of a connection do you people have in the mid-west?

*(SHE turns to ARNOLD.)*

SYLVIA

Our little girl has given us a little boy.

*(SHE turns back to the phone. SHE speaks to ARNOLD with her hand over the receiver.)*

Arnold, these Midwesterners...I can't understand their language...This Etta...

ARNOLD

*(On the phone now)*

What? I don't believe it!

*(HE listens intently.)*

Really? ... Thanks for calling....Sylvia, she had a boy.

SYLVIA

I know she had a boy.

ARNOLD

Then she had another boy.

SYLVIA

Twins?

ARNOLD

And then she had a girl.

SYLVIA and ARNOLD

Triplets!!!

ARNOLD

That Charlie. I don't know why you were so against him—very resourceful. Do you know what he did? When that neighbor who said she used to deliver babies couldn't go through with it, he got Mary Lynn onto a sled and pushed her all the way to the hospital. And they just made it. The babies were born in the lobby. The doctor said he never saw such quick action for a first delivery. They popped out—one, two, three.

SYLVIA

And Mary Lynn never let on a thing. Called every day and talked about *the* baby. Skinny little girl that she was! I used to almost have to push the food into her mouth. Here she was walking around with one hundred and seventy-five pounds. Just goes to show you how you can always expect the unexpected.

ARNOLD

Not so unexpected when you consider how you insisted that she take the fertility pills even though the doctor said she wasn't sure whether or not she needed them.

*(Pause, as they are recovering from this big news)*

SYLVIA

Arnold—what else did she say?

ARNOLD

That the babies all look like her.

SYLVIA

All three of them?...Arnold, you're a man, aren't you?

ARNOLD

I've always been under that impression.

SYLVIA

Now be truthful – from a man's point of view – isn't Etta an ugly woman?

ARNOLD

I would say so.

SYLVIA

If they all look like her, how can we love them? Let's go out there and see for ourselves...

ARNOLD

We can't go now. In the springtime—

SYLVIA

It isn't everyday that we become grandparents.

ARNOLD

You want us to take a plane-which I certainly cannot afford. If, by some miracle I get a job, we'll go.

SYLVIA

I want to see my grandchildren.

ARNOLD

I want to see my grandchildren too. Until such time when we can see our grandchildren – all three of them – we'll just have to make do with phone calls. Once the phone gets fixed, I won't deprive you of that, within reasonable limits, of course. And then there will be pictures. We can even send them a Polaroid camera as one of the gifts.

SYLVIA

When she wakes up, she'll see *her* face, not mine. His face, not yours. They'll call them grandma and grandpa and look at us as strangers, if they ever see us. Our poor child— she'll be so lonesome.

ARNOLD

Not with triplets, she won't!

*(BLACKOUT)*

END OF SCENE 2

## ACT II

### Scene 3

AT RISE: *Two weeks later. Mid-afternoon. The heater is still the only source of heat. SYLVIA is wearing a long-sleeved light dress with boots. ARNOLD is wearing a grey suit with a sweater underneath. On the counter is a pocketbook and on the table a large folder. SHE is at the desk typing. HE sits next to her at a small table folding typed letters and sealing envelopes. SHE is wearing the glasses that they will share throughout the scene.*

ARNOLD

Here I am sending out all these resumes and not one interview in the mail, just a pile of dunning letters from my creditors.

SYLVIA

Maybe you should lie about your age.

ARNOLD

I've told you before and I'll tell you again, even when I tell them the truth, they don't believe I'm as young as I say... The trouble is I'm an undeclared bankrupt who's classified as an unskilled laborer.

SYLVIA

You have to have patience.

ARNOLD

For what? So that I can lose the house like I'm losing the business?

*(HE gets up, tears up one of the letters and throws it into the wastepaper basket.)*

If I don't get a job soon, we're going to have to quit this sex school.

SYLVIA

You're resistant, just as Dr. Faulty says.

ARNOLD

If we don't pay him, we'll see how resistant *he* can be.

SYLVIA

Just because our assignments are getting tougher and tougher is no reason to quit. It's all because of our preconditioning, our inhibitions. That's why he's giving us all these instructions in re-education.

*(Pause)*

All that knowledge and yet so humble. Like all great men, there's something so simple, so childlike about him. Imagine! Saying that he needs us to teach him, just as a teacher learns more from his students, he learns more from his patients than his patients learn from him.

ARNOLD

Do you realize that there is no privacy in that clinic, that everything we say is recorded on a centrally controlled recording system? I wonder if all sex therapists do that.

SYLVIA

Well, you can't blame them for keeping records. With so many patients to keep track of.

ARNOLD

But if we want them we must buy a copy from him.

*(The phone rings. SHE answers it, listening.)*

SYLVIA

*(On phone)*

Hello. Hello. Hello.

*(SHE puts it down.)*

I was sure it was Mary Lynn. But it was a wrong number. My poor little girl.

ARNOLD

What's the matter, now?

SYLVIA

When the dear colicky babies cry day and night the neighbors bang on the walls and Mary Lynn doesn't know what to do.

ARNOLD

It's just a period of adjustment for her, for Charlie, for the babies and for the neighbors too...Come on, let's go over the contract. It says here that though 99% of his patients are cured, he can't make any guarantees, that treatments are at our own risk.

SYLVIA

Those malpractice suits have them all scared.

ARNOLD

This is the first time I ever got a contract from a doctor. And what's more, I never heard of one.

SYLVIA

There are doctors and doctors. A sex man is a little different. He was very compassionate.

ARNOLD

Passionate?

SYLVIA

Compassionate, letting us go ahead like we did.

ARNOLD

For three hundred in advance, putting me more and more in debt, closer and closer to bankruptcy. We really can't afford to go chasing sex doctors, happiness or not. ..I'm seriously considering selling the house, even if it means a loss because any money coming in now can only be a gain.

SYLVIA

Still and all we should consider ourselves lucky that he took us so fast, for we *did* come barging in on him so to speak, calling up from the station after that long walk in the snow and ice, coming in without an appointment. I'm sure he felt sorry for us, especially since he swore he had a four month waiting list.

ARNOLD

I don't care what you say, asking us for three hundred in advance of any treatment smacks of money under the table.

*(HE silently reads the contract.)*

It says here that if we sign this contract and then decide to stop treatment before the year is out, we're still liable for sixty dollars once a week.

SYLVIA

That can't really pertain to us because the year is almost up.

ARNOLD

We'll have to see about that.

*(HE continues to read silently.)*

And if we break an appointment, he must be given forty-eight hours' notice in advance otherwise we'll have to pay double.

SYLVIA

A man like he is, so successful and all—naturally his time is very valuable.

ARNOLD

No sudden illnesses allowed. And a doctor no less. . . I'm not too sure we should sign this contract. Not until a lawyer looks at it.

SYLVIA

I'm sure it's perfectly legitimate.

ARNOLD

I'm in no condition to throw borrowed money away on what may turn out to be a foolish whim.

SYLVIA

Sex therapy, a foolish whim? Why, it's the biggest breakthrough of the century, the crowning achievement of the sexual revolution... And did you see all those diplomas? At first I thought they were part of the wallpaper.

ARNOLD

I'm still wondering about that, among other things.

SYLVIA

This Dr. Faulty is not only a sex therapist, but an internist, a psychologist, a psychiatrist, and a Freudian psychoanalyst. And his co-therapist, she had all kinds of diplomas on the wall, too. I didn't see all of them because they didn't give us a chance; they kept us so busy...I've never been on a team before, not that I can remember.

ARNOLD

Patient team.

SYLVIA

That's what they called us at first, before he introduced us to his co-therapist. Then we became a dual sex-therapy team, you heard him, a team of four.

ARNOLD

And when I asked him why we needed so many people on our team he explained but I'm still baffled by it.

SYLVIA

That must be when you were alone with him, because when I was alone with her, I asked her the same question. She told me that at first they used to treat the man alone, but they have found by trial and error, mostly error, that it is useless to treat one member of the so-called patient team without the other for actually the marriage relationship is the patient.

ARNOLD

Let me get this straight. She didn't explain that to me; the couple's troubled relationship is the patient? But how can something between two people be the patient? Everyone knows that only people can be patients.

SYLVIA

I, too, was always under that impression. Maybe this has something to do with our re-education that they are always talking about.

ARNOLD

What about all those countless men and women who for years and years were being treated for their sex problems individually and paying all those ridiculously high prices? When are they going to get their money back?...And why do we have to have two therapists on our team?

SYLVIA,

Wasn't it explained to you?

ARNOLD

Yeah, yet I still can't understand it.

SYLVIA

Dr. Faulty must have a female co-therapist on our team because unfortunately, so he says, after so many thousands and thousands of years of active participation and endless dreams and reveries, mankind and womankind know very little about each other, where it counts the most. Because we are so different, we hardly understand each other, we need interpreters to tell us about each other. He interprets for me and she interprets for you and then she interprets for me and he interprets for you. All because we are such a riddle.

ARNOLD

We really are riddled...I strongly disapprove of you sharing a bed with this gigolo character he keeps referring to as your future substitute husband.

SYLVIA

I was told that his picture is in the folder. It wouldn't hurt to take a look at it.

*(SHE takes the picture from the folder, shows it to ARNOLD.)*

He's a science major who is helping the clinic in his kind of research, offering his services as a volunteer.

ARNOLD

As your future substitute husband.

SYLVIA

I'm not psychologically ready yet.

ARNOLD

Yet? You're really serious about getting together with him that way?

SYLVIA

I'm only doing it to help you.

ARNOLD

Don't do me such favors.

SYLVIA

He's going to teach me all these new techniques that they have experimented with in the laboratory and found to be successful—all these new techniques that I can use on you. Dr. Faulty says to treat it as a necessary educational process.

ARNOLD

He's young enough to be your son.

SYLVIA

I probably won't go through with it. Our co-therapist is right. It will take me a long time, if ever. I'm much too conventional.

*(SHE pulls out another picture from the folder.)*

And this is the volunteer who is assigned to you as your future substitute wife who will teach you all the latest techniques to use on me.

ARNOLD

She could easily pass for my granddaughter.

SYLVIA

It's just this sort of thing that works wonders for aging men. She's a former model who recently got into scientific research.

ARNOLD

I'd say she's a scientific prostitute.

SYLVIA

I was told that the clinic never uses prostitutes. They never volunteer their services. Besides, they would never pass the screening tests. All of these surrogates have to have a scientific background. A woman doctor is writing a science manual based on her

SYLVIA *Continued*

experiences as a surrogate for fifty troubled men. Our co-therapist claims that she will go down in scientific history for her dedicated contributions.

*(Pause)*

There is a time to be emotional and a time to be scientific.

ARNOLD

And his movies, I suppose you'd call them scientific?

SYLVIA

Absolutely.

ARNOLD

They are nothing but hard core porno. And the only difference between what you see in the theatre is the price. Sixty dollars compared to six...And this nudity thing he keeps harping on, when do you think we'll be ready for it, if ever?

SYLVIA.

We'll never make any progress if you continue to be so resistant.

ARNOLD

We're too old, too set in our ways. With young people it's different.

SYLVIA

Some people are sexual way into their eighties, in a few cases, well into their nineties.

ARNOLD

Next you'll tell me a hundred.

SYLVIA

That's stretching it a bit.

ARNOLD

This is turning out to be a much too costly fiasco. Let's face **it**—we can't stand the thought of prancing around in the nude in the privacy of our own home. How the Hell are we going to do it with a bunch of other couples? And it doesn't make any difference that we are all in the same boat, either.

SYLVIA

He claims he has cured so many couples that they have formed a club.

ARNOLD

For all we know he may be conducting a nudist colony on the side.

SYLVIA

I never knew people could have sex with their eyes.

ARNOLD

Very young people. Not us. With good eyes.

*(Pause)*

Boy, can that guy ask questions. Worse than the army.

SYLVIA

We've been married for twenty-five years and we walk into the office of a complete stranger and we find out things we never knew existed before. Whoever would have thought you were a virgin when we got married.

ARNOLD

It's nothing to be ashamed of.

SYLVIA

Did I say it was? And I respect you for it. I bet we were the only two virgins in the whole neighborhood to marry each other.

ARNOLD

State of sexual apathy, that sounds awful.

SYLVIA

Do you think that the state of sexual readiness sounds any better?

ARNOLD

And to think that those hormone pills had absolutely no affect on you. Seems perfectly logical what he says about women like you. Menopausal women whose hormones suddenly go into reversal; the cold ones become hot, the hot ones become cold. Marriages break up. Couples who have struggled for years adjusting to each other have to begin all over again. No wonder they say women are fickle....I can't get over those questions.

SYLVIA

They really brought back memories.

ARNOLD

Some of them were just plain silly.

SYLVIA

How would you describe our first kiss? Savage, calm, tender or warm?

ARNOLD

Savage. I was young and I felt like tearing your clothes off right there in the hallway.

SYLVIA

I checked tender. I was filled with all kinds of romantic notions. And I know where I got them from. The movies.

ARNOLD

What did you check, yes or no, on did you marry for sexual attraction?

SYLVIA

I put maybe. I really couldn't tell. It wasn't ladylike to admit such a thing. I must have been attracted to you, that way, even if I was too inexperienced to know it.

ARNOLD

How does he expect me to remember the exact night when I first began to feel apathetic?

SYLVIA

He wants to pinpoint it so that he can help us all the more. I'm sure he made you feel better when he explained that everyone suffers from apathy to some degree. The thing to look for is not to let it become chronic. The same for readiness...I was especially impressed by what he said about that couples who came for treatment because they wanted to find out if every night was normal and after several round table discussions they both admitted that they were so eager to please each other that they had gotten into this nightly routine until the man developed sleeping sickness. And now they are on vacation—a completely sexless vacation and they are blissfully happy.

ARNOLD

I don't think I've ever had such a complete physical. And those lab tests—he even X-rayed my toenails.

SYLVIA

Be thankful that the only thing wrong with you is balding eyelashes.

ARNOLD

And you just have enlarged bunions.

SYLVIA

Besides what I'm periodically suffering from—which seems to have momentarily gone away.

*(HE takes two charts from the folder.)*

ARNOLD

Here is your chart. And this one is mine.

SYLVIA

This one is yours.

ARNOLD

No, it's yours.

SYLVIA

But it has all the parts of a man. And yours has all the parts of a woman.

ARNOLD

That's the way it's supposed to be. Didn't you understand what your co-therapist was saying?

SYLVIA

She told me that we should pick up the charts on our way out—they have so many of them. And when we feel confident that we can fill in all the parts we should ask for the blank ones on her desk and fill them in, but only after we return these. Reminds me of a geography course I took once in school. The teacher gave us blank maps and covered the one on the wall and we had to fill in all the countries.

ARNOLD

This is not geography. It's more like biology.

SYLVIA

Seems more like a human anatomy class.

ARNOLD

They call it physiology.

SYLVIA

I think we should concentrate on our homework for today.

ARNOLD

I don't know why they gave us a double assignment.

SYLVIA

Could be because they think we're making such wonderful progress. Come on.

ARNOLD

Homeplay. I'm fifty years old. My powers of concentration are wearing out.

SYLVIA

Do you have it?

ARNOLD

It's in my coat pocket.

SYLVIA

Mine's in my bag.

*(HE exits into hallway, SHE crosses to bag, HE returns with paper.)*

ARNOLD

If what he says is true, that sex is instinctive, why do we have to take lessons?

SYLVIA

We'll have to inquire about that.

ARNOLD

*(Reading)*

Sit next to your partner.

*(SHE sits next to him, both on bench.)*

SYLVIA

*(Reading)*

Brush his hand very lightly with yours. Interlace fingers. Try to relax together. Close eyes. Lean back. Inhale...Exhale.

*(After following the directions, they lean back so far that they almost fall off the bench. When they recover, HE takes the glasses from her, puts them on.)*

ARNOLD

*(Reading)*

Look deep into each other's eyes, until you see your partner's reflection.

*(THEY gaze at each other intent on finding their respective reflections.)*

SYLVIA

I see me. Do you see you?

ARNOLD

No. Not yet. Wait a minute. Hold your head still.

*(HE holds her head between his hands.)*

Now I see it.

*(HE lets her head go. Looks down on the paper, continues to read.)*

Make a love trail as you kiss her hair, then her cheek, moving slowly to her lips and then, hold it.

*(HE does so. They kiss without otherwise touching.)*

SYLVIA

Are you ready for our next assignment?

ARNOLD

I'd rather wait until tomorrow. We won't see him until next week. There's no rush.

SYLVIA

There's no time like the present. And we've lost a lot of time already.

ARNOLD

OK. Let's get it over with. What is it? I don't have it.

SYLVIA

*(Reading)*

Take a bath or shower together. Make notes, write report.

ARNOLD

The tub's too small.

SYLVIA

Not really.

ARNOLD

We'll get leg cramps.

SYLVIA

A shower, then.

ARNOLD

The tub's too narrow.

SYLVIA

It's just as he said, you have a severe nudity block. And after twenty-five years of marriage.

*(HE suddenly flings off his jacket, then his heavy sweater, his tie, his shirt and undershirt, pulls a startled SYLVIA towards the direction of the bathroom.)*

Wait a minute.

*(SHE lets go of his hand and gets paper and pencil from the desk, heads for the bathroom as HE follows. The remainder of the scene is played off stage. Sound of running water.)*

SYLVIA

Oh, Arnold.

ARNOLD

You like that, huh?

SYLVIA

You're not apathetic after all. We must control ourselves, follow all of his directions. There must be no slip-ups.

ARNOLD

Will you please stop writing?

SYLVIA

I have to get it all down while it's still fresh in my mind.

ARNOLD

The paper's so wet, you won't be able to read it.

SYLVIA

You should be taking notes too.

ARNOLD

How many things do you expect me to do at one time?

SYLVIA

It's amazing. You're making progress already.

ARNOLD

Now!

SYLVIA

In due time.

ARNOLD

Now!

SYLVIA

*(Breathless)*

Arnold, you mustn't. He doesn't think you're ready. He gave us specific instructions not to.

ARNOLD

The Hell with his instructions!

SYLVIA

We mustn't, until it becomes irresistible and then only with his permission.

ARNOLD

It's more than irresistible. Sylvia, come on.

SYLVIA

Arnold, restrain yourself.

ARNOLD

Married twenty-five years and now we have to ask permission.

SYLVIA

Stop. Call him.

ARNOLD

You talk too much.

*(BLACKOUT)*

END OF SCENE 3

## ACT III

### Scene 1

AT RISE:

*A week later. Early evening. Through the window we can see that it is raining. A stove has been brought into the kitchen. SYLVIA, in a skirt and blouse, is at the stove using a poker. ARNOLD enters carrying a pile of twigs and split logs. He is wearing a lumber jacket. Soft music is playing on the radio.*

SYLVIA

Arnold, who would think that this was the first time you ever chopped down a tree and split logs? You have a real talent as a lumberjack. That's what you should apply for, cutting down trees.

ARNOLD

They're mostly twigs and the only trees I cut down were the small ones. No one would hire me even if I knew how to cut down those heavy trees out back. I'm fifty years old and not only do I look older, thanks to all of my worries, even if by some miracle they wanted me, I don't have the stamina.

SYLVIA

But no one can say you are not resourceful . . . I'm glad we were able to bring up this old stove. Who knows how long it was down in the basement? It must have belonged to the first owners and that could have been over a hundred years ago, this house is so old.

*(SHE coughs and holds her throat as the smoke chokes HER.)*

ARNOLD

For centuries people used stoves and fireplaces and nobody complained. Who knew from pollution? Today they walk around clutching their throats.

*(HE takes off his jacket, revealing a heavy shirt, places it over a chair, sits near stove.)*

This gas and oil shortage reminds me of another time when we experienced shortages, too. World War II, remember?

SYLVIA

How could I forget? My mother was a coffee addict before they knew of such afflictions. And when coffee and sugar were rationed she went into convulsions when she couldn't get her fix.

ARNOLD

My uncle ended up in jail because he was always stealing ration books...Sitting here by the stove makes me think of all of those bygone days when I was a kid. We didn't worry about gas or oil then. My father never felt that he could afford a car. And we didn't have radiators. Cold water flats, that's what we lived in.

SYLVIA

Where do you think I lived? In a mansion? We were so poor.

ARNOLD

We were poorer.

SYLVIA

What is this? A contest?

ARNOLD

We were so poor that the average family now on welfare is rich in comparison.

SYLVIA

We were on relief.

ARNOLD

My father was too proud for that. He preferred for us to starve-graciously.

SYLVIA

We could have used food stamps, too. We almost starved. My mother spent half her time in the relief office trying to track down checks that belonged to us, claimed by forgers. You were old enough to read then. It was all over the papers.

ARNOLD

I was a slow reader. Malnutrition. Why do you think I'm so short?

SYLVIA

I'm short too.

ARNOLD

Another case of malnutrition.

SYLVIA

Every morning, my mother got up early to make the stove.

ARNOLD

I had to make the stove, even when I was a little boy because she never got up before ten.

SYLVIA

My mother used to make such good things on that old stove, I'll never forget them.

ARNOLD

I had to make my own breakfast. One day, she got up early. She smelled smoke. That was the day I almost burned the house down...She gave me such a beating, I still have the marks. Was it my fault that I had such poor coordination?

SYLVIA

I'm sorry she died before I had a chance to meet her; I would have given her a piece of my mind.

ARNOLD

A piece wouldn't have helped—she needed your whole head.

SYLVIA

We had four small rooms, including a living room which was used only for company, closed off the rest of the time. My father never stopped complimenting my mother on her marvelous housekeeping. When he died, the year I was ten, my mother, my sister and I all shared a room because the other bedroom was given to the boarders. Well, naturally we had to do most of our living in the kitchen. Yet, even there, we were forced out.

ARNOLD

Forced out of your kitchen with no living room?

SYLVIA

Mother gave them kitchen privileges. Seems she was too dignified to go out to work. Preferred to suffer all sorts of indignities. Too bad the kitchen was so small.

ARNOLD

Don't blame her. She was caught in the depression. How well I remember it! Banks failing...men jumping out of windows.

SYLVIA

When Uncle Ralphie, mother's baby brother, lost his fortune we—

ARNOLD

Then you weren't so poor.

SYLVIA

He was a miser who hated everybody, especially Mother. He jumped out of a four story window; miraculously he broke only his legs and a couple of ribs. His wife stood over him in their bedroom which she converted into a barred cell. For years afterward he still believed it was 1930 and the next time he jumped it was going to be it.

ARNOLD

A nice time to tell me insanity runs in the family.

SYLVIA

It was a well-guarded secret. Well, since it slipped out, I may as well tell you the rest. He died the year before we met. In his sleep. And my aunt grieved so much that she jumped out of the window.

*(The phone rings.)*

Hello. Darling, how are you? They sound healthy. Charlie always was a deep sleeper. Try to take a nap. They will when they get older. What did the doctor say? The colic will go away. I can't really say. A little cereal, maybe. They can't be allergic to everything. You were a good baby, a poor eater, but a good baby. Must be on Charlie's side. Mother love is sometimes slow in coming. Your tummy will *so* go down. Do the exercises. What are you blaming me for? You wanted a baby. Now, don't deny it. We never know these things. A boy, a girl, one, two, three. Now stop crying. Four people crying at once on the telephone, your father and I can't stand it. It's only the new mother's blues, not depression. You'll see next week, you'll feel better. Of course we love you. Daddy loves you too. We expect to see you soon. Of course we want to see our grandchildren. That's very inconsiderate of those people. Did you speak to the landlord? Oh, they did? When? I'm glad he's so good at it. I'm sure everything will be all right. It's only temporary. Even colicky babies grow up to make their mothers proud. That's a good idea. Go change them. So could we all use three pairs of hands. Goodbye, darling.

*(SHE hangs up.)*

She's depressed.

ARNOLD

And I suppose I'm not.

SYLVIA

And what am I? The big cheerer-upper. I'm a menopausal woman. I have a right to be depressed.

ARNOLD

I heard of the new mothers' blues, but I never heard of the new grandmothers'. So, what did she tell you?

SYLVIA

Charlie's been laid off.

ARNOLD

He was on the skeleton crew.

SYLVIA

They got rid of all the skeletons.

ARNOLD

A three hundred pound skeleton. A good accountant like that.

SYLVIA

They have to move.

ARNOLD

It's a good thing they have money in the bank. We almost talked her into calling off the wedding when we found out how stingy he is. The landlord didn't raise the rent or anything like that?

SYLVIA

No.

ARNOLD

Then why?

SYLVIA

He's evicting them because he can't stand it when the neighbors bang on the walls when the babies cry so much. And she's worried that no other landlord will rent to a couple with newborn triplets....Why can't they live here?

ARNOLD

Here? In this house? With us?

SYLVIA

You said yourself that we don't need this great big house, that we're always here in the kitchen. For the first time, we'll really make use of these rooms. Besides, they need a house, not an apartment.

ARNOLD

Then *I'll* have to bang on the walls.

SYLVIA

We'll fix up a nursery on the third floor. With the doors closed, you won't hear a thing. And we could certainly use Charlie's help with the mortgage.

ARNOLD

Didn't you tell me that he got laid off? That they laid off all the skeletons?

SYLVIA

That's nothing.

ARNOLD

That's something.

SYLVIA

Very enterprising, that Charlie. Very enterprising.

ARNOLD

If he has no job he can't be very enterprising.

SYLVIA

He's been preparing for this.

ARNOLD

How?

SYLVIA

It began with the babies, poor colicky darlings that they are; they drove him out of the house.

ARNOLD

And now you want them to drive me out of the house.

SYLVIA

So long as they stay on the third floor you—

ARNOLD

And when they get older and start climbing down the stairs, all three of them, no, it won't workout.

SYLVIA

As soon as he took her home from the hospital, that very first day he enrolled in this course and he's been going every single night, weekends included.

ARNOLD

It's a wonder he didn't take to drink. There's nothing like something like that to put your nerves on edge, especially after a good day's work. Why didn't you tell me this before?

SYLVIA

I was afraid he'd walk out on her. I didn't want to worry you, too. Do you know how many men have left their wives because they couldn't stand their own children? You can't count them. But the women – they have to stay. No wonder women are sitting in neuro-psychiatric wards-talking to themselves.

ARNOLD

He's a college graduate. What does he need courses for?

SYLVIA

Graduate school.

ARNOLD

Seems when you graduate, you don't graduate

SYLVIA

You can always graduate into something higher.

ARNOLD

Like what?

SYLVIA

Blacksmithing.

ARNOLD

Blacksmithing?

SYLVIA

So that he could be sure of getting a job when they laid off all the skeletons.

ARNOLD

Who teaches blacksmithing?

SYLVIA

They had to dig up old men-some past a hundred and carry them in on stretchers; it's such a dying craft. Charlie is so good at it that he is already qualified to teach it.

ARNOLD

From a CPA to a blacksmith. That's quite a jump-backwards.

SYLVIA

Our garage would be a perfect workshop for him. And if the gas shortage gets any worse he'll be all prepared to take over as soon as the horse and buggy and the stagecoach comes back in, to say nothing of the pony express.

ARNOLD

Now, wait a minute. Whoever said that transportation would take such a drastic turn?

SYLVIA

The economists. A few years ago he took a course in agriculture. You remember. He could teach us all about farming. You won't have to worry about a job, not with all that land back there.

ARNOLD

I'm too old to be a farmer.

SYLVIA

A gentleman farmer, then. I certainly have no objection to being a farmerette, growing vegetables and Mary Lynn could pitch in too, in due time.

ARNOLD

I'd rather sell it.

SYLVIA

Until we get a decent offer. We could raise chickens, ducks, even turkeys. No more crackers and jelly for Thanksgiving. I'll write them and tell them to come as soon as they're ready. But first I'm going to get some hot soup made for the triplets, to ease the colic, poor darlings. They will come by horse and wagon.

*(SHE bends down to search for some cans in the lower cabinet. HE bends down alongside her.)*

ARNOLD

Let me help you.

*(HE reaches way over, stretching so much that their shoulders touch since she is bent forward pointing the way. HE gets the can, holding it with one hand as with the other HE tries to get up himself. This results with them both falling down, ending with them both sitting on the floor.)*

SYLVIA

I see you're taking Dr. Faulty's advice.

ARNOLD

Yeah. Said we must keep communicating.

SYLVIA

Seems he knows how to treat the aging man.

ARNOLD

Will you please stop referring to me as the aging man?

SYLVIA

What men like you need is just the opposite of what you do. Instead of withdrawing, you need more exposure. Of course this whole thing could be a sign of menopause. Another way of saying this would be a pause of men....Easily excitable, that's another sign.

ARNOLD

He talks about things most people never heard of.

SYLVIA

Well, you know doctors, up with the latest. Of course, males always had a menopause. It's just that the knowledge of it is so new.

ARNOLD

I don't believe it!

SYLVIA

The next thing you know they'll be experimenting.

ARNOLD

I'll never consent to being used as a guinea pig.

SYLVIA

They have monkeys for that. For all we know, you may be all finished.

ARNOLD

What do you mean—all finished?

SYLVIA

With your menopause... Seems the older we get, the more we have in common.

*(In the background the music has been playing softly.  
Now, a news commentator's voice can be heard.  
ARNOLD puts up the volume. THEY listen.)*

## RADIO VOICE

We interrupt this program to give you the latest bulletin, just handed to me. Because more than sixty percent of all Americans are dissatisfied with their marriages, by the tens of thousands happiness-seekers are flocking to sex therapists, with nary a thought to their qualifications. As a result, the field has been over-run by quacks, incompetents and downright criminals who flaunt bogus diplomas and run phony clinics. Instead of cures, these victims are repaid in depressions, nervous breakdowns and in extreme cases, even suicides. Fortunately, one of the happiness-seekers happened to be a detective who went with his wife to a sex clinic, hoping to save his troubled marriage. Certain procedures made him suspicious. Impatient happiness-seekers are laying out large sums just to avoid waiting lists for as long as six months, signing contracts making them liable for as much as sixty dollars a session up to a year even if during the interim they choose to terminate treatment. Substitute husbands and wives are supplied under the guise of therapy. Pornographic, hard core movies are shown at exorbitant prices. Nudity encounters are commonplace. We urge any of you listening who are either involved in this therapy or considering such involvement to contact your local hospital for a list of qualified practitioners. If you feel you've been duped, contact your senator, congressman and your governor. And now, back to our music.

*(As THEY listen, THEY move closer to the radio. THEY visibly react. At the conclusion, ARNOLD turns off the radio with a vengeance.)*

ARNOLD

We've been robbed!

SYLVIA

Oh, my God! He almost corrupted our morals, decent respectable people like us. He could have driven me into a deep depression-me, being menopausal and all. Or he could have driven you to suicide with his twisted values. What a terrible thing we've gotten ourselves into!

ARNOLD

Where did you get this phony's name, this so-called Dr. Faulty?

SYLVIA

From the phone book. Don't you remember?

ARNOLD

Here I am wondering what I'm going to do for a living and we go throwing money away like we're millionaires – making crooks rich.

SYLVIA

We're not the only ones. This country is full of duped happiness seekers.

ARNOLD

Is that supposed to make me feel better, that we're two in a crowd? ...Boy, am I glad we finally got that phone fixed!

*(HE crosses to the phone; dials.)*

Operator, give me the police department. Any police department. It doesn't matter. ..Hello. I want to speak to the police chief. Yes. Is this the police chief? I want to know if a Dr. Martin Faulty, a so-called internist, psychologist, psychiatrist, Freudian psychoanalyst and sex therapist of 1000 West End Avenue, Suite 12G, New York City has been arrested....That long? And why can't they? I find that hard to believe! I see...I see...

*(While on the phone, HE has listened very carefully. HE hangs up, furious.)*

The police can't touch these guys.

SYLVIA

Why not?

ARNOLD

There are no guidelines. None of them have to be licensed or certified.

SYLVIA

What else did he tell you?

ARNOLD

That anyone can hang out a shingle, open a phony clinic and call himself or herself a sex therapist.

SYLVIA

That's hard to believe. If the police can't protect us against imposters, who can?

ARNOLD

That's just it—everyone for himself.

SYLVIA

But why would the police allow something so dishonest? When will they be able to control it?

ARNOLD

In time.

SYLVIA

When?

ARNOLD

Maybe, next year.

SYLVIA

That's certainly not going to do us much good. Why must it take so long?

ARNOLD

According to the police chief, it's a new science and like all new sciences and like all new medical practices it takes years before guidelines are established.

SYLVIA

But why?

ARNOLD

Mainly, because the so-called experts agree to disagree before they lay down their ground rules.

*(HE crosses to the desk. He takes out the revolver from the desk drawer.)*

SYLVIA

*(Terrorized)*

What are you going to do?

ARNOLD

Kill that bastard—that crook!

*(SHE tries to wrest the revolver from him. In an effort to prevent it from going off, HE stands on tiptoe and reaches his arm as high as it will go. SHE tugs at his sleeve.)*

I have only one bullet. I want to be sure I hit my target.

SYLVIA

Arnold, let's sit down. Give me the gun. Let's talk about this like civilized people.

ARNOLD

Who do you think invented guns? The cannibals?

SYLVIA

I never thought you'd ever really want to use that gun.

ARNOLD

We bought it for just such emergencies.

SYLVIA

Arnold, stop swinging it like that!

ARNOLD

I'm not swinging it. My arm's shaking.

SYLVIA

I knew you couldn't do it.

ARNOLD

Where is justice? He took my money and there is no way I can ever get it back. He's lawless and the law can't touch him. That's why I have to take the law into my own hands. With this gun.

SYLVIA

Put it down! Please put it down! Arnold!

*(HE moves toward the door. SHE gets there first and blocks it.)*

More than anything, we want to work out our problems.

ARNOLD

That was yesterday. Today I want to kill that bastard.

SYLVIA

Don't be hasty. Never do anything when you're emotionally upset.

ARNOLD

Sylvia, are you going to get away from that door or do I have to pull you away?

**This is Not the End of the Play**

**Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes**