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Safe at Home!

A One Act Comedy in 4 Scenes

by Dan Morra

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Safe at Home

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CHARACTERS

Bill Matheson - *typical middle-aged husband; likable; once a good athlete, he has retained a fairly athletic build and his competitive spirit; loving in a quiet sort of way; presently more concerned about his softball performance than that in the bedroom*

Martha Matheson - *somewhat provincial middle-aged wife; concerned about her love life but hesitant to take concrete steps without being pushed; able to be inspired if appropriately approached*

Dr. Wright - *serious English professional who is easily flustered by the unexpected and happiest when in control of the situation and setting; competent; not a sports fan; unwilling to force clients into expressing themselves in clinical vernacular*

Joe White - *former trainer for a major league baseball team; has a happy-go-lucky, seat of the pants approach to life*

Helen - *slightly younger neighbor; self-confident and full of vitality; concerned and willing to act immediately; more assertive than her husband*

Charlie - *nondescript maintenance man; generally unflappable; reassuring and competent*

Herb (Voice Over) - *Bill's best buddy and teammate; good husband and provider but does not heed everything his wife says*

SETTING

The kitchen of a contemporary suburban home and adjacent offices in a modern office building in the city; much of the play alternates between the two office settings.

SYNOPSIS

Failing to perform up to expectations in his softball league, a middle-aged man is oblivious to his wife's concerns about his efforts in the bedroom. In a truly strange concatenation, they each go to professionals for assistance at the same time and place and, somewhat surprisingly, both gain significant insights.

ETC.

*Winner, 24th Annual Henrico (VA) Theatre Company One-Act Playwriting Competition;
Premier production February 12-28, 2010.*

Safe at Home
by Dan Morra

SCENE 1

AT RISE: THE PHONE RINGS. The lights come up to reveal a portion of a contemporary kitchen. There is an island on which sit a coffee maker and a telephone. Behind are cabinets, etc. After the third ring the answering machine clicks on.

HERB, Voice Over

(On answering machine) Hey buddy, it's Herb. I've got a line on somebody who can help you with your problem.

BILL enters, hurrying, a tie over his shoulder and buttoning his shirt. HE pushes a button on the phone to put it in the speaker mode.

BILL

Hi, Herb. What's up?

HERB

You're in luck, pal. I talked with a friend of a friend and we got you in.

BILL fiddles with the coffee maker then starts tying his tie.

BILL

Terrific. When?

HERB

That's the catch—today. This morning, in fact.

BILL

Yow...

HERB

Can't make it?

BILL

It'll be tough but I guess I can juggle some things around. What time?

HERB

Nine sharp. Ninth floor of the Barton Building. The guy's name is White. I don't remember the room number, but it shouldn't be too hard to find him. I hear he's the best there is. He helped Wally and Ray.

BILL hunts for a pen and piece of paper.

BILL

Ray I can believe, but since when did Wally need any help? That guy can swing.

BILL writes down the information related by Herb.

HERB

Yeah, but he used to strike out a lot, way too much if you ask me.

HE folds the paper and puts it into his shirt pocket.

BILL

Well hopefully we can get this resolved. I'll tell you, I've never been this miserable.

HERB

Listen, man, it happens. Every now and then everyone goes into a slump. A little professional help and you'll be as good as new.

BILL

Professional?

HERB

Yep. The guy's an ex-trainer for some team in the American League.

BILL

A trainer? What's a trainer know about softball?

HERB

More than you think. Like I said, he's done wonders for Wally and Ray. So talk to him and see if you can get that swing straightened out. You know, the playoffs start next weekend and if you -- well, I mean...

BILL

If I can't do better than what I have been the last few weeks our team is sunk. Thanks for not putting any pressure on me.

HERB

Hey, you think our over 40 league is pressure you should hear what my wife got me into.

BILL

Ballroom dancing?

HERB

Worse than that...And your wife has evidently been talking with her. In fact, I'm supposed to -- oh, oh, forgot the garbage again and the truck's coming. Gotta run; catch you later, bud.

BILL

See ya.

BILL hangs up, checks his watch, takes a sip of his coffee, then moves to the kitchen entrance and yells.

Honey, I have to go.

MARTHA

(From Off) Wait!

MARTHA enters, hurrying to wrap a robe around her.

Why didn't you wake me?

BILL

I thought you needed the rest.

HE pours a cup of coffee and hands it to MARTHA.

MARTHA

But I wanted to make you breakfast.

BILL kisses MARTHA on the cheek.

BILL

I'll take a rain check.

HE turns quickly.

I have to run.

MARTHA

So early? I...I wanted to talk with you.

HE turns to face her.

BILL

Ok, talk.

MARTHA

(With mild exasperation) No, not for 30 seconds on the fly. I mean really talk.

HE approaches and gives MARTHA a gentle hug.

BILL

I'm sorry; it's just been so hectic lately that—

MARTHA

I know, I know...

SHE turns away then turns to face him again.

I saw Helen yesterday and...well, she said Herb was going to talk with you.

BILL

He has.

MARTHA

Really?

BILL

Just got off the phone with him.

MARTHA

(With surprise then hesitation) Oh, that was fast... Well what did he have to say?

BILL

He set me up.

MARTHA

Set you up?

BILL

Um-hum. I have an appointment this morning at 9:00.

MARTHA

You do? This morning? Well I thought we should discuss it...more...some anyway.

BILL

No need to; it's my problem and I'll take care of it. Herb says the guy's a pro.

HE checks his watch again.

I really do have to run.

HE kisses her on the cheek.

See you, sweetheart.

BILL turns and exits. MARTHA waves.

MARTHA

(As door closes) Bye.

SHE exhales deeply then moves to pour herself more coffee. She sits pensively for a few seconds. There is a knock at the door. SHE turns. HELEN enters.

HELEN

Good morning.

MARTHA

Oh, I guess.

HELEN pulls up a seat beside her.

HELEN

Why so glum?

MARTHA

I don't know.

HELEN

You didn't have your little talk with him, did you?

MARTHA

It's really not that easy to bring up.

HELEN

You're preaching to the choir, Martha, but you need to do it. You won't be happy until you do. Believe me, I know.

HELEN gets up and pours herself a cup of coffee.

Did he talk to Bill?

MARTHA

Yes, surprisingly he did. Evidently just a few minutes ago. And he said he has an appointment this morning.

HELEN

Really, so fast? Wow, when we went we had to wait two months to get in. Must be a slow week in the sex therapy business.

MARTHA

Oh please don't say that. It's not just about...well, you know.

HELEN

No, as a matter of fact I don't. You're so nebulous and hard to pin down.

HELEN sits and takes her hand.

Listen, you're having problems...It's OK; almost everyone does, at least occasionally. The key is to not let it come between you, well metaphorically speaking anyway. You have to get over this puritanical aversion to talking about it. That's what the therapy is all about.

MARTHA

But I don't want to talk about it.

HELEN

Well if you won't, who will? Do you really think your husband will admit to anything? Men don't, ever, because they feel threatened or inadequate. But when they discuss it with a professional, with you there by their side, things can get better.

MARTHA

Well I won't be, will I? At least not on the first visit.

HELEN

What?

MARTHA

Bill didn't say anything about me being there with him.

HELEN

Well then it's almost worthless.

SHE rises and pulls MARTHA up.

You have to go.

MARTHA

But he—

HELEN

No buts; get dressed. What time is the appointment?

MARTHA

Nine o'clock...I'll never make it.

HELEN

Yes you will, I'll drive you. The office is on the ninth floor of the Barton Building.

MARTHA

But the traffic; I'll be late.

HELEN

Late smate...What are they going to do, start without you? Go, go.

MARTHA shoos her offstage.

(To herself) Imagine not telling her to be there...Men!

FADE OUT.

SCENE 2

AT RISE: The exterior doors of two adjacent offices. The somewhat disheveled maintenance man CHARLIE enters and unlocks the right door and flicks on a light. A well-dressed, middle aged man, DR. WRIGHT, follows; notepad and briefcase in hand, obviously a bit frazzled.

WRIGHT

Really Charles, of all the ridiculous—

CHARLIE

(Soothingly) Charlie, doc, Charlie. Now relax, it's not the end of the world. It's just a faulty sprinkler.

WRIGHT sets down his briefcase.

WRIGHT

But the furniture, the carpet...

CHARLIE

I'll take care of everything. By tomorrow we'll have you back in your own office, I promise. Look on the bright side, you got an empty one right here. You don't even have to leave the floor.

WRIGHT

But my clients...

CHARLIE

I'll put a sign up.

WRIGHT

(Holding out an appointment book) The appointment book is ruined; I can't even read the names.

CHARLIE

I'll dry it out and get it back to you quicker than you can say five-four-three twin killing.

WRIGHT

What?

CHARLIE

Around the horn, doc.

WRIGHT

Whose horn? And what does a horn have to do with my appointment book?

CHARLIE shakes his head, ruefully.

CHARLIE

I forgot, you're not a baseball guy, are you doc? You know, there's a lot you can learn about us from what we think about sports.

WRIGHT

(Somewhat dismissively) Yes, yes, I'm sure it's eminently relevant to understanding the American psyche, but for the time being I'd prefer to rely on my extensive clinical background, if you don't mind.

CHARLIE steps aside.

CHARLIE

Suit yourself, doc. Just remember, you're not in jolly old England anymore. Go in and make yourself at home. If I see anyone that's looking for you I'll bring 'em right over.

WRIGHT exhales with mild disgust then shakes his head and hands CHARLIE the appointment book; CHARLIE exits. WRIGHT turns and enters the office.

BILL enters, a small piece of paper in hand. HE glances at the paper as he walks and bumps into DR. WRIGHT who has just emerged from the office.

BILL

Oh, excuse me. I'm looking for a gentleman by the name of White.

WRIGHT

(Extending his hand) It's Wright... Doctor Wright, actually. I'm sorry for all the confusion. The sprinkler head in my office failed and they put me here just a few minutes ago. My appointment book is ruined ... it's just not a good beginning to the day. But, you're the one who should be talking. *(Gesturing)* Come in.

BILL complies and enters; WRIGHT glances both ways in the hall then turns and enters, shutting the door behind him.

Immediately afterward MARTHA appears. SHE stops, looks both ways and turns to depart, bumping into a middle aged man, JOE WHITE, in a jogging suit who is hurrying toward the other office door.

MARTHA

Oh, I'm sorry. I wasn't looking. I—

WHITE

It was my fault entirely. I beg your pardon. Can I help you?

MARTHA

Well, I...

WHITE

Don't be shy; I'm really not all that bad.

MARTHA

No, no, I'm looking for a man, two men actually.

WHITE

Well, well, you're not shy at all, are you?

MARTHA

Oh no, one is my husband.

WHITE

I won't hold that against you. And the other?

MARTHA

Ah, it's Doctor ...Wright...

WHITE

White? That's me. And it's not doctor. Mister is even too formal. I actually prefer Joe. And you are...

MARTHA

Oh, I'm sorry—

WHITE

Quit apologizing, please. This never would have happened if I hadn't been running late and almost bowled you over.

HE reaches into his pocket and checks a Blackberry.

The man you're looking for wouldn't be named Bill, would he?

MARTHA

Oh yes he would.

WHITE

Good, then you're in the right place. And on time, I might add. So, he's the one who's late. Does that make you feel any more at ease?

MARTHA

Well, at ease is a relative term, but yes, I guess it does.

WHITE inserts the key into the lock and opens the door.

WHITE

Come on in.

HE flips on the light and waits.

MARTHA

I really hate to – well, you know – talk about things when my husband's not here.

WHITE

I understand, but I'm sure he'll be here any minute now. Please, come have a seat.

SHE looks both ways down the hall then turns and enters. WHITE closes the door behind her.

FADE OUT.

SCENE 3

AT RISE: Two offices; one belonging to JOE WHITE and the other in use by DR. WRIGHT. Throughout the scene, the lights fade in and out as action shifts between the offices. With the fade in and out, the action freezes in one office and resumes in the other.

LIGHTS FADE IN first on WRIGHT'S OFFICE. It is spartan with a simple desk and chair with an additional facing chair. BILL is wandering around as WRIGHT opens his briefcase and hurriedly withdraws a legal pad and comes around the desk.

WRIGHT

Rather spartan, isn't it? Again, let me apologize.

BILL turns.

BILL

I like it...It's uncluttered. Too bad our lives can't be like that.

WRIGHT

Interesting observation. Please, have a seat.

BILL complies.

So—oh I'm sorry, I don't even know your name.

BILL

(Standing) Bill Matheson...

HE extends his hand and THEY shake.

Pleased to meet you.

BILL sits; WRIGHT leans against the desk.

WRIGHT

So, Bill, how is it you came to see me today?

BILL

Well you were highly recommended.

WRIGHT

Thank you...First, let me assure you that anything you say will be held in complete confidence. And by that I mean I will not divulge anything to anyone, not even your partner, without your explicit consent.

BILL

That's great, but you don't have to treat my problem like is a state secret or anything. Quite frankly, I don't think my wife really understands the trouble I'm having.

WRIGHT

I suspect she does and, believe it or not, it's probably troubling her as much as it does you -- maybe even more so.

WRIGHT crosses back and forth in front of the desk, almost as giving a lecture.

You see, often our partners realize there's a problem before we do but they're hesitant to say anything. She doesn't want to appear judgmental or to make the situation worse. Add to that her own fears that she could in some way be at least partially culpable and you have a very heavy burden. In fact, it's for that reason that I recommend that couples come in together.

WRIGHT stops.

WRIGHT, *Continues*

And that leads me to my second point—honesty. I want you to be completely straightforward with me. I've had many years of experience and have dealt with almost every problem imaginable, so nothing you say will shock or surprise me. I must admit, sometimes the American vernacular puzzles me, but I can usually figure things out from context. So feel free to express yourself in whatever terms seem most natural to you. Agreed?

BILL nods. LIGHTS FADE OUT.

LIGHTS FADE IN ON WHITE'S OFFICE

The layout of White's office is similar but it includes bookshelves full of books and various articles of sports memorabilia.

WHITE pulls up a chair for MARTHA.

WHITE

Have a seat.

MARTHA hesitates.

MARTHA

Oh, this is just so difficult. I think my husband should be here.

WHITE

He should. It is his problem, right? But I'm sure he's on his way and until he gets here maybe we can chat and lay the groundwork for dealing with what's troubling him.

SHE hesitantly sits. There is a distinct pause.

MARTHA

I...I just feel uncomfortable talking about it, especially when he's not here.

WHITE

Please, if you know it's an issue, Bill knows it's an issue, too. Let's start at the beginning. Your name is...

MARTHA

Martha....Martha Matheson.

HE extends his hand; SHE cautiously shakes.

WHITE

Pleased to meet you, Martha. And let me say it's wonderful you're here to help Bill try to resolve this issue.

MARTHA

You do?

WHITE

Yes; far too many women downplay or even completely ignore the challenges facing a man of your husband's age.

MARTHA

They do?

WHITE

You seem surprised.

MARTHA

Well, I'm no expert but it seems like their happiness is involved, too. I mean if he can't...

SHE pauses, searching for the proper phrasing.

WHITE

Perform up to his expectations?

MARTHA

Well, yes, I guess you can say that. I mean, I'm supportive – as much as I can be – I think.

WHITE

I'm sure you are. Just to orient me, has he ever had this performance problem before... earlier in his life?

MARTHA

No, no, he's never had issues before, at least not as long as I've known him. We've been together since our senior year in college, so I can't really say anything about what may have happened earlier.

WHITE

And has he ever worked with anyone like me before?

MARTHA

Oh no....at least I don't think so.

*FADE OUT WHITE'S OFFICE
FADE IN WRIGHT'S OFFICE*

WRIGHT

Let's start at the beginning. How long have you been married?

BILL

Twenty-three years next month.

Children?
WRIGHT

Two... both in college.
BILL

WRIGHT
So, can I assume there have been significant changes in recent years?

BILL
Well, some... I guess my biggest concern is that I just don't seem to be on my game, at least not as often as I used to.

WRIGHT
What makes you say that?

BILL
To be perfectly honest with you, my performance hasn't been all that great recently.

WRIGHT
Perhaps; do you have any idea why not?

BILL
Well, I realize I'm getting older and I know I'll never be as good as I once was.

WRIGHT
I understand; that's a reasonable concern. Many men your age feel the same way. But it doesn't have to be a major detriment to your "game." How does your wife feel about this? Has she said anything about your performance?

BILL
No, no, I don't think she ever would. She's very kind and accepting. I guess she understands...

FADE OUT WRIGHT'S OFFICE
FADE IN WHITE'S OFFICE

MARTHA
I ... I try to be helpful, provide encouragement, you know.

WHITE
Have you ever said anything specifically about his failures?

MARTHA
Oh no, I'd never do that.

WHITE

Why not? Don't you think he knows?

MARTHA

Well, I, I guess I never thought it was my place to. I mean, what do I know?

WHITE

Don't sell yourself short. Clearly you understand the situation or you wouldn't be here.

MARTHA

Yes, I understand but...I only know the woman's perspective, though. What right do I have to criticize—

WHITE

But you're not criticizing, you're offering valuable feedback. Let's be realistic: No man bats a thousand. In fact, if he fails six out of every ten times he's still doing pretty well, especially when you consider the fact that the majority of middle aged men have almost no interest in trying, or, if they do, they're too out of shape or out of practice to have any success whatsoever.

MARTHA looks at him with amazement.

MARTHA

Really?

WHITE

Yes; the fact that your husband has the desire and the ability to participate, even if his performance doesn't meet his expectations – or yours – is quite encouraging.

*FADE OUT WHITE'S OFFICE
FADE IN ON WRIGHT'S OFFICE*

WRIGHT

Let's try to deal with specifics. Oftentimes couples come in together, and that may make things a bit easier, but let's just focus on you and your specific areas of concern. I know many people find this difficult, but I do have to ask—what sort of frequency are we talking about?

BILL

Weekly usually; sometimes it's back to back, Saturday and Sunday afternoons. It all depends on our schedule and, you know, the weather. That sometimes complicates things.

WRIGHT

Really; in what way?

BILL

Well, it's just miserable when it's cold or raining, but we go on as best we can.

WRIGHT

OK—and, ah, you're satisfied with this "schedule?" I bring that up because rigidity or a lack of spontaneity can sometimes be quite detrimental to one's performance.

BILL

No, I don't think there's anything wrong with the schedule. I mean, in theory I could go weeknights, too. But, I do have to earn a living and after a long day at work I'm usually a little tired, so I'm fairly happy with just weekends. Not to mention the wear and tear on my body. I mean, sometimes I have these fantasies—

WRIGHT

Forgive me for interrupting, but I believe it's essential to point out that's perfectly normal.

BILL

About making a living doing it, but then I realize there are millions of other guys thinking the same thing and what makes me so special to think it would work out for me and not them. There's probably no real demand for it anyway, at least not in a formal, organized setup. There'd probably be all kinds of liability headaches, too, especially for guys my age.

WRIGHT clears his throat nervously.

WRIGHT

Yes, well weather conditions aside, what do you think affects your overall performance?

BILL

I'm afraid it's a lot of things really—mental, physical, psychological.

WRIGHT

It's wonderful you see it that way. Start with the physical.

BILL

Well, everybody knows the first thing you have to do is to get something good to look at.

WRIGHT

And your wife understands this?

BILL

Oh yeah; she understands.

WRIGHT

Good...Go on.

BILL

Well, I mean, it sounds pretty elementary: keep your balance, get a rhythm, stay focused, be patient, relax...I understand all that. I'm pretty traditional when I'm up—erect, hips and

BILL, *Continued*

shoulders level, knees slightly bent, weight evenly distributed, arms slightly away from my body. I worry about my hand position sometimes but I've got a pretty consistent grip. I even have calluses.

BILL holds up his hands to show him.

I'm pretty good at transferring the power from my hips to my hands but lately – I hate to say it – there's just no pop in my bat. I try to keep it steady but sometime my timing is off and I can't hold up. I used to be nicknamed the Mailman because I always delivered but lately I've been almost worthless. I'm confused, I'm missing signs, my confidence is shot, and I really don't know what to do. So what do you think, can you help me?

WRIGHT shifts in his chair, obviously uncomfortably, then quickly composes himself and clears his throat.

WRIGHT

Well, you certainly seem aware of your, ah, issues. But I suspect that your problems aren't as serious as you fear, especially relative to other men your age.

BILL

Oh I know; I talk about stuff with the guys all the time; you know, just to see if they have some suggestions.

WRIGHT

That's quite enlightening. Being proactive is commendable.

*FADE OUT WRIGHT'S OFFICE
FADE IN WHITE'S OFFICE*

WHITE

As best you can determine, would you say your husband's complaints center around the physical or mental aspect of his game.

MARTHA

Well, I don't think he sees it as a game...much, I mean, anymore. He used to, we both did. But we were a lot younger and...

WHITE

I understand. There's no need to apologize; as we age we develop different priorities and, for men in particular, some things, especially relating to physical accomplishment, become more important. That's not inherently wrong, provided it doesn't get out of control. And again, for men, there may be a tendency to have unrealistic expectations. It can be very hard for them to let go of their youth because it's such a large aspect of how they see themselves. The bigger question revolves around his mental approach and commitment in the face of declining performance. Essentially what it comes down to is love. Does he still have that love?

WHITE stands and walks across the room; HE picks up a baseball bat, takes a slow motion practice swing and returns to his desk.

WHITE, *Continued*

(As HE toys with the bat) Let's try to get specific. How's his hand eye coordination?

MARTHA

Good, good. He's pretty coordinated. I...I don't think that's a problem.

WHITE

Able to stay focused?

MARTHA

Yes, certainly...well, I guess his mind wanders occasionally, but just for a second or two. That's not a significant problem, is it?

WHITE

It could be but it's pretty typical. Even the best of us have a tough time concentrating for long periods of time.

MARTHA

It could be my fault, too. Maybe I'm not as ... focused as I need to be -- sometimes.

WHITE

It's much more his responsibility than yours; the fact that you're there for him providing support is commendable.

WHITE twirls the bat.

How about mechanical things?

MARTHA

(Nervously) We don't—

WHITE

Is it tough for him to get a sense of rhythm, does he feel natural?

MARTHA clears her throat nervously.

MARTHA

Could I...Could I have a glass of water, please?

WHITE

Certainly.

WHITE rises, crosses to a small table, and pours her a glass of water. HE returns and hands it to her. SHE takes it and gulps quickly. WHITE notices her discomfort and manages a polite smile. HE sits.

WHITE, *Continued*

I'm sorry; I don't mean to put you on the spot. It's asking a lot of you, isn't it?

MARTHA

Well, I ... I'm just not sure how to express certain things. You'd think I'd know, at my age, I mean. It's not like we're novices. I... I try to offer suggestions occasionally, but I don't want to seem like a know it all.

WHITE

I understand.

HE returns the bat to its place and picks up a baseball.

I'll try to be more concrete.

HE offers it to her.

How about showing me his grip?

MARTHA takes the ball quite hesitantly.

*FADE OUT WHITE'S OFFICE
FADE IN WRIGHT'S OFFICE*

WRIGHT

Let's go back to what you said earlier. Why do you think you miss signs occasionally?

BILL

Just a lack of concentration I guess. I mean, over the weekend I got the green light when we were in a tight spot and got caught looking.

WRIGHT

Caught looking? And you've discussed this with your wife?

BILL

Sure.

WRIGHT

And accepted responsibility?

BILL

Oh yeah; she knows when I screw up. She's really great about it. I probably embarrass her sometimes.

WRIGHT

What makes you say that?

BILL

Just the stupid stuff I do.

WRIGHT

Like what?

BILL

Well, two weeks ago when I was up I forgot to take the donut off my bat.

WRIGHT

A donut on your bat, ah-ha...And this was rather disconcerting?

BILL

I'll say.

WRIGHT

But she was not in any way upset.

BILL

No. We had a good long chuckle about it later.

WRIGHT

Good, very good. That sort of mutual acceptance of one's mistakes is essential in a healthy relationship... You also said something about your confidence level. Tell me more about that.

BILL

Well, some days I just don't know if I have it anymore. I notice it especially when I play the field.

WRIGHT

(Somewhat incredulously) You play the field? And your wife approves of this?

BILL

Sure. I mean, she was a little concerned a couple years ago, worried I was going to get hurt.

WRIGHT

That's understandable, don't you think?

BILL

Yeah, but I know the risks. Maybe that's why I've become more cautious.

WRIGHT

Can you explain that?

BILL

Well, I know I'm not as dependable as I used to be.

WRIGHT

When you're playing the field?

BILL

Right. So, positioning is even more important. But sometimes they come at me and they're just too hot to handle. I say I still have the leather but, in all honesty, sometimes I'm afraid. It's scary.

WRIGHT

Yes, I'm sure it is...What's your wife's overall reaction to all of this?

BILL

She worries but she knows how important it is to me. I mean, it'd be a real blow to my ego if I was just a one dimensional player.

WRIGHT

Yes, well I guess there are advantages to being multi-dimensional. Any other significant concerns?

BILL

Just my delivery.

WRIGHT

Your delivery?

BILL

Yeah. I toe the rubber, too. Only occasionally though.

WRIGHT

Oh...And your delivery when you "toe the rubber" doesn't satisfy you?

BILL

Not really. I don't know, some days I just can't bring it the way I used to ... Years ago I was smooth, no wasted motion. But sometimes now I'm a complete mess.

WRIGHT

In what sense?

BILL

My mechanics. I just have a hell of a time with my control.

WRIGHT

And that's because of your mechanics?

BILL

Yeah. I mean, I know what I should do but I just can't seem to pull it off sometimes.

WRIGHT

Hmmm. Perhaps you can elaborate a bit. Sort of walk me through everything.

BILL

Everything?

WRIGHT

Yes, everything. Take your time and try to be ... thorough.

BILL

Well, I usually warm-up for a while – ten or 15 minutes – just to get loose. I stretch a lot; I realize I've lost a lot of my flexibility, but sometimes I'm incredibly stiff.

WRIGHT

That's a rather extraordinary complaint. Has your wife commented on this?

BILL

Not directly. I mean, she knows. It's not like she's blind or anything and she understands about the warming up stuff. I guess I don't think she really appreciates how hard it is... to get ready, I mean. And it's not just the physical part. It's a mental challenge, too. I really have to psych myself up get the job done. There's a lot of pressure to come through in the clutch, especially if it's near the end.

WRIGHT

Yes, ah, I'm sure there is. Let's get back to your, for the lack of a better word, technique.

BILL

Oh, OK. Well, I used to rock back and forth a lot to generate more power but I think that made me sort of herky-jerky.

WRIGHT

Herky-jerky?

BILL

Yeah, it seemed like I could never bend enough or turn my hips at the right time in my delivery so recently I've just tried to simplify everything—gone back to the bare essentials you might say.

WRIGHT

And this going back to the bare essentials improved your delivery?

BILL

Yeah, it did. I'm glad the guys suggested it.

WRIGHT

Obviously these guys are close friends.

BILL

Oh, sure.

WRIGHT

Well, we shouldn't argue with success, should we? So now that you've gone back to the bare essentials is there anything else that concerns you ... in terms of your delivery.

BILL

Unfortunately yes. Sometimes my follow through sucks.

FADE OUT WRIGHT'S OFFICE

FADE IN WHITE'S OFFICE

WHITE takes an empty water glass from MARTHA and sets it on the desk. HE crosses to the small table and brings the pitcher over and refills her glass.

WHITE

Don't take this the wrong way, but something tells me your husband is a much more comfortable talking about this than you are.

MARTHA forces a nervous laugh.

MARTHA

I've always suspected that.

WHITE chuckles.

WHITE

Well, I was going to have you show me exactly what he does...

MARTHA sucks in a breath audibly and tenses noticeably with eyes wide open in fear.

...but maybe I better bring that up with him.

MARTHA relaxes a bit.

Let's approach this from a different perspective... What's his best position, in your opinion.

MARTHA

Well, I... I'm not sure. I mean, maybe what I think is best isn't what he thinks is his best.

WHITE

Well, have you ever expressed your opinion?

MARTHA

Yes, yes, I've mentioned it.

WHITE

And how has he responded?

MARTHA

I, I think he agrees...

WHITE

But?

MARTHA

Well ah, I don't think he wants to be tied down – not literally – to one position I mean.

WHITE

I understand. What do you think?

MARTHA

I...I'm OK with that.

WHITE

Tell me, regardless of position, do you think he makes many errors?

MARTHA

I... I wouldn't say he's perfect, but most of the time he's very, very good... in any position.

WHITE

What do you consider his strengths? Would you say he's agile?

MARTHA

Agile?

WHITE

When things come his way does he pounce or glide? Does he have good hands?

MARTHA

Yes, yes his hands are fine. In fact, I think he has great hands.

WHITE

And have you told him that?

MARTHA

No, no not recently. I guess I really haven't in a while.

WHITE

OK, maybe we should switch gears, change the focus a bit.

MARTHA picks up the glass and takes a sip.

Let's talk about his head.

MARTHA spews out the mouthful of water.

FADE OUT WHITE'S OFFICE

FADE IN WRIGHT'S OFFICE

WRIGHT is pouring himself a glass of water. HE offers water to BILL who declines.

WRIGHT

I'm, I'm somewhat hesitant to ask this, but are there any other aspects of this crisis of confidence you'd like to discuss?

BILL

Well, I know I've slowed down...

WRIGHT

As one would expect from a man your age.

BILL

Yeah, but it's very frustrating at times.

WRIGHT

That's quite normal.

BILL

I understand. It's just hard accepting the fact that I can't go from first to third like I used to.

WRIGHT clears his throat.

WRIGHT

Perhaps you could elaborate a bit.

BILL

I don't get a good jump sometimes, even when I'm in scoring position. I think I'm not as aggressive or daring as I used to be because I'm not sure I'll make it. Hell, I even used to go in head first.

WRIGHT takes a big gulp from his glass.

FADE OUT WRIGHT'S OFFICE

FADE IN WHITE'S OFFICE

WHITE hurriedly offers MARTHA a handkerchief. SHE refuses and takes a tissue from her purse and begins wiping her dress. WHITE wipes up the water from his desk.

WHITE

Can I assume that the mental aspect is what concerns you the most?

MARTHA forces a smile, obviously relieved.

MARTHA

Oh, I'm sorry, I... I...

WHITE

It's all right. It's wonderful you're so concerned. I guess what I'm asking is if his situation is having a noticeable impact on his personality.

MARTHA

No, no I don't think so. I'm not even sure it's all that important. I mean, I love him dearly, and whatever happens happens. He's a very special man and nothing he can or can't do will change the way I feel about him. I just wish I could tell him that without him thinking he's been inadequate in some way.

WHITE

Those are wonderful sentiments and I know he'll appreciate them. It seems to me you just have to get over your inhibitions about discussing the situation. Maybe he doesn't know as much as he thinks he knows, even in spite of his experience, and maybe you know more than you realize. Just openly and honestly talking about expectations and performance could go a long way in helping him. And try to be as specific as possible. For example, if you think he's out of position or his hands are too low let him know. Just yell it right out.

MARTHA

Oh, I could never... I mean, someone might hear.

WHITE

So what? Who cares? You're his wife; don't you have the right to go a little crazy once in a while? I know a woman who has a cow bell and rings it like mad when she's excited. Letting him know you believe in him could be just the spark he needs. Don't be afraid to express how you feel. That's what being part of a team is all about.

WHITE extends his hand; she rises and does likewise. THEY shake.

MARTHA

I will. Thank you...thank you very, very much.

FADE OUT WHITE'S OFFICE

FADE IN WRIGHT'S OFFICE

WRIGHT is walking around the room in a contemplative manner; he turns to face BILL.

WRIGHT

Mr. Matheson, I must say while I find the issues you're dealing with to be quite common, your way of expressing them is entirely unique. And that is, I believe, indicative of great strength of character and self-confidence. So, while I can offer a variety of suggestions for dealing with the challenges you face, ultimately you, along with your wife of course, hold the key to solving those problems. First, despite what you may have heard and what has been widely touted, there is no magic potion or pill to take. Yes, there are products -- and we both know what they are -- that can provide a short-term performance "boost", shall we say, but I am decidedly against long-term use. And, I suspect that someone like yourself is not focused on short term success but rather on quality performance over time.

BILL nods affirmatively.

So, I believe that the key to your improvement rests primarily on the shoulders of you and your wife.

BILL

You really believe she's that important? I mean, I sort of thought it was all my responsibility.

WRIGHT

Most assuredly not. While on the surface that sounds magnanimous of you, in reality it's a tad selfish; you're limiting her input and, perhaps unintentionally, demeaning her significance. You are part of a team, and that team functions as a team if and only if players commit to and trust one another. So, I recommend that you place more trust in her and give greater consideration to her insights and suggestions.

BILL

And you really think that will help, I mean with all the physical stuff —my timing, reflexes, speed?

WRIGHT

The human psyche is extremely complex; you'd be surprised at how a subtle change can produce such dramatic results.

BILL stands and extends his hand.

BILL

Thank you. I really appreciate it.

WRIGHT

You're most welcome. And please bring your wife next time; she sounds like an extraordinary woman.

FADE OUT

SCENE 4

AT RISE: The Matheson's kitchen, after dark. One small bulb furnishes the only light. The room is as it was before except for...

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