

Six Sour Raspberries

by

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SIX SOUR RASPBERRIES

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ACT ONE

*There are four playing areas: **One**, stage right, features a love seat /chaise lounge, just large enough to accommodate two people. **Two**, upper center stage, features a card table or small four-top, surround by four chairs, all of which “cheat” outward somewhat. The chair positioned most upstage is stacked with several board games. **Three**, stage left, is two chairs with a small, nondescript table between them. **Four**, downstage center, features, in Act One, a small desk or table and two chairs. In Act Two, this area is empty. For best effect, each of the four playing areas should be on a different level.*

***At Rise:** CALLIE and DUV are seated on the chaise, stage right. Duv has his arm across the back of the chaise. Both hold beverages, and both gaze outward dreamily. They have probably been sitting this way for a good long while.*

CALLIE. *(After a pause)* I think heaven is a complete lack of self-awareness. *(After a few seconds, DUV turns to look at her)*

DUV. What?

CALLIE. If it's really paradise, then I don't think you're you. You don't even know there *is* a you.

DUV. *(Cuban accent)* ‘Splain, Lucy. *(Callie sips her drink before continuing.)*

CALLIE. It's beautiful. Way more beautiful than this. And there are no distractions to keep you from staying completely focused on it. Enjoying it without reservation.

DUV. When did you come up with this theory?

CALLIE. Just now. A few seconds ago. As long as you're aware of yourself, of who you are, then even as you're enjoying something, you're also thinking about other things.

DUV. Such as?

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CALLIE. (*Thinking a few seconds*) Oh, the dirty dishes in the sink. Saturday is my mom's birthday, and I haven't sent a card yet. The laundry. I really need to do laundry. I've been wearing this underwear for two days, now. (*Beat. Without fanfare, DUV removes his arm from the back of the chaise.*)

DUV. So, if there's no self-awareness in heaven, then I guess you aren't with your loved ones.

CALLIE. Oh, they're there. But the relationships you had with them in this life are meaningless there. We're all a big, collective unconscious.

DUV. Well, that seems pretty bleak. I'm not sure I want to go to a heaven like that. (*Pause*) If I get to Heaven at all.

CALLIE. Not at all. Think about it. Think about the relationships you've had up until now. We're always trying to live up to others' expectations. Does my boss think I'm doing a good enough job that I could ask for a raise? Are my parents proud of me? Does my boyfriend think I'm cute? Is my girlfriend checking out other people when we go out? Am I fat? (*Peering close at DUV's face and touching the bridge of his nose*) Is my unibrow starting to grow back? (*Duv, in mock annoyance, shoves her hand away.*) In heaven, we can just let go of all that. It doesn't matter. We can relax and just enjoy everything around us without wondering what anybody else thinks.

DUV. (*Beat; he looks at Callie.*) So... are you?

CALLIE. Am I what?

DUV. Are you checking out other people?

CALLIE. Of course. I'm not your girlfriend.

DUV. You're a girl, and you're my friend. You're my girl friend.

CALLIE. We tried that road. No Emerald City. (*Thinking*) I wonder if I can squeak by with getting her a gift certificate.

DUV. Your mom?

CALLIE. She always says that shows both a lack of imagination and of caring. And that would be correct. But I could shop all day, and no matter what I came up with, I wouldn't have any real confidence that it would be something she liked.

DUV. Take her out to eat *and* give her a gift certificate. You're showing that you care, and she can still get something she likes.

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CALLIE. (*Considering this*) Or maybe I could just get her a certificate for a restaurant. She could take a friend. Or my brother. Somebody she actually likes.

(*Duv shakes his head and gets to his feet*)

DUV. I give up. I'm going home.

CALLIE. Hey, what are you doing on Friday?

DUV. (*Guardedly*) Why?

CALLIE. Duv, I hate it when you answer a question with another question.

DUV. I've learned the hard way, Cal. When people ask what I'm doing on such-and-such day and I say, "Nothing," I all of a sudden find myself helping them move, or picking up their relatives at the airport. If at all possible, I like to be doing something someplace else when a piano needs hauling up a flight of stairs.

CALLIE. Your generosity of spirit overwhelms me.

DUV. I guess there's no collective unconscious heaven in *my* future.

(*Sighs*) I don't have any plans for Friday.

CALLIE. Well, there's this new woman in my office.

DUV. (*Sitting*) Oh, boy.

CALLIE. She just moved here from Bridgeport, and she doesn't really know anybody yet.

DUV. Oh, boy.

CALLIE. We got to talking the other day, and she's funny and interesting, and she seems really nice. Genuine. You know?

DUV. Oh, boy.

CALLIE. Stop saying that! Anyway... I was telling her how we sometimes have these game nights, and maybe she'd like to come to the next one, and—

DUV. —Game nights?

CALLIE. Yeah. Where a bunch of us get together to—

DUV/CALLIE. (*Finishing in unison*) --play games.

DUV. Yeah, I get it. So, when have you ever done that?

CALLIE. I have! You have, too! A bunch of us. We used to, remember? We had a blast!

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DUV. We played that video trivia game, once, three years ago. We didn't even follow the rules!

CALLIE. So? That was a game night. And now, we're having another one. Friday. I'm going to make stir fry, and then we'll all play.

DUV. Play what? And who's "we?"

CALLIE. I don't know! Games! Whatever. I'm asking Dodie. Pam said she could probably make it, too. And Andy and Rob. And Lori. That's the new woman.

DUV. Seems like you're going to a lot of effort for this.

CALLIE. It's no big deal. Stir fry. Everyone can help themselves. Monopoly and a deck of cards. What's so difficult about that?

(Duv scrutinizes Callie for a few seconds.)

DUV. So, this woman... Does she..? Have you..?

CALLIE. Look, can you be here on Friday, or not? That's all I really need to know. *(Standing)* I need to get to the laundry.

DUV. Yeah, I'll come. What time?

CALLIE. Seven-thirty. No, seven. You can help me set up. *(Callie exits stage right. ROB enters from stage left, crossing to the middle playing area as the lights come up there. Duv remains sitting, looking thoughtful, as the lights fade in his area. Then he rises and crosses to join Rob at center. Rob is inspecting the boxes of board games on the upstage chair)*

ROB. Battleship... Sorry... Clue... Parcheesi. Where did she get all these? And just how long does she expect this evening to last? Until the sun comes up?

DUV. She's anxious. Wants to make sure there's something here we'll all like.

ROB. Most of these look brand-new.

DUV. There's a bunch of wadded-up cellophane in the wastebasket under the sink. I think she bought some of these today. Borrowed the rest.

ROB. This is very odd.

DUV. Just play along. It's for a good cause.

ROB. Isn't it going to be a giveaway when somebody has to read the rules to me? I never play games.

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DUV. We'll just have to—(he spots Lori coming; changes the subject) -- I don't know, Rob. I don't see it anywhere. Maybe Callie doesn't have... (Trying to think fast) ...*Candyland*. Any more. (*LORI enters left and crosses to the center area in time to hear this.*)

DUV. Hey, Lori.

LORI. Hey. Callie wants to know what everybody wants to drink. (*Lori begins to look through the games as DUV and ROB glance at each other.*)

DUV. I'll go help her. (To Rob) What do you want?

ROB. Just a Coke. (*As Duv starts to leave*) Oh, maybe one beer. (*As DUV starts to leave again.*) No, a Coke.

(*Duv throws Rob an exasperated look and then exits. Rob watches him go. Lori continues to inspect the board games.*)

LORI. Did I hear him say "Candyland?"

ROB. I believe he did, yes. (*Pause*) We have very eclectic taste. ...on these games nights. So, you just moved here?

LORI. Last month, yes.

ROB. For your work?

LORI. (*Nodding*) Job transfer. I needed a change. (*Pause*) There are a lot of games, here.

ROB. Yes, there are... (*When Lori glances up at him*) We're a fun-loving group. And usually there are more of us.

LORI. I wondered. Callie made it sound that way.

ROB. (*Trying to cover*) Yeah. This was just one of those nights when it seemed like most of... the gang... had conflicts come up.

LORI. (*Looking up; now focused entirely on Rob.*) So, until halfway through dinner, I thought you and Duv were... you know: A couple. (*Duv enters, carrying three beers and a Coke. He remains some distance away, and Rob and Lori do not see him. He listens to the conversation.*)

ROB. Oh, no. Not at all. No, Andrew is my partner. Andy. He's out of town. Last-minute thing. (*Duv crosses and joins the others*) He was going to be here.

DUV. Along with everyone else. Dodie. And everyone. So, it's just the four of us. (*Looking down at all the games*) And all of... these. (*Handing Rob both a beer and the Coke*) I brought both. Take your pick.

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LORI. Uh, so where's the bathroom?

DUV. *(Gesturing off)* It's through there.

LORI. Thanks. *(Lori exits)*

DUV. *(Sitting)* So, Andy's in Chicago?

ROB. Evanston. Burl's wife went into labor last night. For some reason, he thought he should stay with her, so Andy went in his place. It was a zoo this morning. He's throwing things into a suitcase, I'm on the phone, trying to book him a flight, *and* get his dental appointment re-scheduled. Plus, get my own butt to work.

DUV. How long's he gone?

ROB. He gets back Sunday afternoon. Pretty much shoots the whole weekend.

DUV. Yeah, I guess. So, you want to do something tomorrow night? Catch a movie, or something?

ROB. Maybe. Let me think about it. *(Callie enters from left, carrying a bowl of popcorn, a bowl of mixed nuts, and a beer.)*

CALLIE. Here, grab some of this before I drop it.

(Duv takes one of the bowls from her arms and sets it on the table)

CALLIE. Thanks. *(Setting down her beer and the other bowl.)* So, what game do you think we should play?

DUV. You mean, besides the one we're playing right now?

CALLIE. Don't do that. Where is she?

ROB. Bathroom.

CALLIE. We should decide before she gets back. *(Sitting)* What's good with just four people?

DUV. Naked Twister.

CALLIE. *(Looking at Duv)* You may sit quietly with your hands folded, while the adults talk. *(To Rob)* What do you think?

ROB. Well... Is there one of these that you know better than the others?

CALLIE. I tried to pick things I remembered as a kid. *(looking at the games)* They all seem kind of silly now... People on the television commercials always looked like they were having a blast playing them.

ROB. She's coming! *(Lori returns. She and Rob pull out chairs and sit.)*

LORI. So, what are we playing? *(They all look at each other.)*

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CALLIE. We were just talking about that. The tradition is, the new person gets to choose.

LORI. Oh. Well... Boy, it's been a long time since I've played some of these. *(Spotting a deck of cards among everything else.)* Oh, hey! Cards! *(Taking them out starting to shuffle.)* How about Hearts? No, wait... poker! *(Lori continues to shuffle. The others watch her. After several seconds, Lori stops and looks at the rest of them.)*

LORI. Oh... Was I supposed to pick one of the board games?

CALLIE. No, no! Cards are fine!

DUV. Yeah, this is great.

ROB. I like cards. *(Pause. Lori shuffles some more. The other three look at each other uncomfortably.)*

LORI. Do you have any chips?

CALLIE. No, sorry. Just popcorn and nuts.

LORI. No, I meant poker chips. To bet with. That's all right. We don't have to have them. It's just kind of fun that way; easier to remember who's winning. Oh, wait! We can use the nuts! Is that all right?

CALLIE. Sure.

LORI. Give everybody a handful. I'll deal to start. Five-card Stud, okay? *(Again there is the slightest hesitation between the other three. Lori, shuffling, doesn't notice. Callie dumps the bowl of nuts on the table and divides them between the players.)*

DUV. Sure.

ROB. Sounds good. *(Lori plops the deck on the table in front of Rob and looks at him. Rob stares at the deck.)*

LORI. Cut the deck.

ROB. Oh. *(He does. Lori picks up the deck and deals hands to everyone.)*

DUV. It's been a while. I may be a little rusty.

CALLIE. *(Nudging him under the table.)* It'll come back to you. *(Everyone picks up their hand and studies their cards. Lori shifts hers around in her hand confidently; the others are more tentative.)*

LORI. Should we make it a pair or better to open? *(Glancing at the rest of them who aren't sure what she means.)* Nah, let's just play. After all, the stakes are just Planters Mixed Nuts. *(To Duv, seated on her right.)*

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You're up. Oh, wait! Got to ante up, first. *(Lori slides one nut to the center of the table. The others follow her lead.)*

LORI. *(To Duv)* Okay, sailor. *(Duv studies his cards thoughtfully, then tentatively slides one more nut to the center of the table.)*

DUV. One.

LORI. *(To Callie)* To you, sister. *(Callie slides one nut to the pile.)*

LORI. *(To Rob)* You coming along for the ride? *(Rob slides one nut to the pile)*

LORI. Okay, looks like everybody's in. *(Sets down her hand and picks up the deck of card to deal; to Duv.)* How many can I do you for?

DUV. *(Hesitating)* I'll take three cards. No! Just two.

LORI. *(Dealing him two cards)* The man's got an interesting strategy going. *(To Callie)* You?

CALLIE. *(Setting down one card)* One.

LORI. *(Dealing her a card)* Oh, Mama! This little lady bears watching. *(To Rob)* And for you?

ROB. *(Setting down four cards)* Four, I guess...

LORI. *(Amused; dealing him four cards)* Well, this is shaping up to be an interesting hand. *(Dealing herself two)* And dealer takes two. *(There are a few seconds of silence as everyone adds their new cards to their hand and studies the results)*

LORI. *(To Duv)* You still with us?

DUV. *(Sliding one nut forward)* One cashew.

CALLIE. *(Sliding two nuts forward)* I see your cashew, and I raise you a Brazil nut. *(Lori, Callie and Duv all look at Rob, who is still rearranging his cards. When he realizes they are all looking at him, he freezes.)*

LORI. That's three to you to stay in the game. *(Rob slides three nuts to the center of the pile.)*

DUV. Wait a minute. One of those cashews is broken. I don't think that should count.

ROB. It's the only cashew I have! Callie gave me mostly peanuts and a few almonds!

CALLIE. It doesn't matter. They're all worth the same.

DUV. Speak for yourself. *(Grabbing a nut from Callie's pile and popping it in his mouth.)* I hate Brazil nuts.

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CALLIE. *(Swatting his hand)* Quit that! Eat your own money!
(Grabbing one of his nuts and transferring it to her pile.)

DUV. You kept all the cashews for yourself!

LORI. *(Adding five nuts to the center pile.)* While fisticuff breaks out, I'll see you, and raise you a pecan half and...whatever the hell this one is.
(All four of them lean forward to inspect the mystery nut)

ROB. I think that's a hazelnut. Just oddly shaped.

DUV. It's not a hazelnut. It's too flat.

CALLIE. It looks melted.

ROB. *(To Duv)* Dare you to eat it!

CALLIE. We're not eating the pot! Leave it alone! We're in the middle of a hand, here.

LORI. *(To Duv)* Three to you, Bucko.

DUV. *(Tossing down his cards)* Too nutty for my blood. I'm out.

LORI. We have a casualty. *(To Callie)* Two to you, Missy.

CALLIE. *(Sliding more nuts into the center)* I'll see your pecan and your mutant nut, and raise you two peanuts and another almond

DUV. *(Impressed)* Whoa! *(The lights begin to fade slowly in the center area as the dialogue continues.)*

LORI. The woman thinks she's holding on to something. Guess we'll see. *(To Rob)* That would be five to you, Rob. *(Rob is studying his remaining "money")*

ROB. I have a weird one, too! *(Picking up a nut and sniffing it)*

LORI. It's okay, Rob. It doesn't really matter. Not for our purposes.
(Rob licks it, frowns thoughtfully, then pops it in his mouth and chews.)

ROB. I thought so! It's one of those corn nut thingies. *(To Lori)* That's what yours is, too. *(To Callie)* How did you get corn nuts mixed up in your mixed nuts?

DUV. Isn't that why they call them 'mixed nuts,' Einstein?

ROB. They don't put corn nuts in mixed nuts! They aren't even real nuts. They just call them that.

CALLIE. Can we just play the game, please? *(The lights have faded completely on the central playing area. Callie and Lori rise and cross down into the stage right playing area. In the darkness, Duv and Rob continue to talk for another moment.)*

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DUV. They're full of sodium! That's about all they are, in fact!

ROB. What about you and those processed cupcake thingies you're always eating? Better living through chemistry?

DUV. Hey, chocolate is a natural, beautiful thing! *(As Callie and Lori reach the area in front of the chaise, their amused expressions indicate they are hearing this argument. They stop walking, and their smiles fade. It is a somewhat awkward moment.)*

LORI. Thanks for inviting me. It was a nice evening.

CALLIE. I'm glad you could come. I hope you'll join us again next time. ...This, uh, this wasn't one of our more shining evenings.

LORI. It was fine.

CALLIE. Usually, we're... Usually there's more of us. It just... Well, you know how it is, sometimes. Things come up.

LORI. I had a great time. No need to apologize. Your friends are nice. Terrible poker players, but nice.

CALLIE. All the more ironic, huh? First timer's luck, I guess. *(They both laugh. Then an awkward pause settles in again.)*

LORI. Well, I'll see you on Monday.

CALLIE. Have a good weekend. *(Lori starts to leave. Callie would desperately like to say something more.)*

CALLIE. I... *(Lori looks back at her)*

CALLIE. Call me if you're looking for something to do. I know how it must be, new to the city. So, if you're bored, or... you know... anything. *(Lori smiles, then turns and exits stage right. Callie watches her go. After a moment, she turns and crosses back up to the center playing area, where the lights are coming back up. Rob has gathered all of the nuts back into the bowl. Duv has put the cards back into their box and is gathering up the bottles and glasses.)*

CALLIE. You guys don't have to do that. Give me those. *(Callie takes the bottles and glasses from Duv and exits upstage right. Duv and Rob look at each other.)*

DUV. What do you think?

ROB. *(Confidently)* Oh, yeah.

DUV. Why do you say that?

ROB. Did you see the way she dealt cards? Big time.

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DUV. Yeah, let's plug right into the stereotypes.

ROB. It wasn't *just* that. (*Studies the bowl of nuts*) But things become stereotyped for a reason.

DUV. Let me just mentally alphabetize my Garland albums while you elaborate.

ROB. I'm just saying... (*Rob stops speaking as Callie returns. She looks at both Rob and Duv.*)

CALLIE. What? (*Pause*)

ROB. Great stir fry.

DUV. Best game night ever.

CALLIE. Shut up. (*Pause*) Thanks. For this. (*Rob and Duv look at each other. Then:*)

DUV. No problem.

ROB. Whenever there's a need for deception and subterfuge...

DUV. ...we're your men.

ROB. You think she bought it?

(*Callie shrugs. She begins stacking the game boxes on the table.*)

DUV. I gotta pee. Back in a minute. (*Duv exits upstage left*)

ROB. Lori seems really nice. I hope... (*Rob trails off as Callie looks at him. She smiles.*)

CALLIE. I can *not* believe you actually won the whole pot. You are the worst poker player ever.

ROB. (*Holding up the bowl of nuts*) Yeah? I've got a whole bowl of nuts that says otherwise, lady.

CALLIE. You want me to put those in a baggie for you to take home, or are you going to eat them here?

ROB. I'm not putting these in my mouth! Everybody's mitts have been all over them. God Only Knows where Duv's hands have been. (*Thrusts the bowl at Callie.*) Throw these out. And then scald the bowl. (*Callie laughs. Rob kisses her on the cheek.*)

ROB. I'm outta here. Thanks, Cal. I hope... (*Shrugging*) I hope whatever happens is what you want to have happen. Call me if there's a wedding.

CALLIE. Good night, Sweetie. (*Rob exits stage right. Callie watches him go, then looks at the bowl of nuts in her hand. Tentatively, she picks*

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one up and studies it as though she might be about to eat it. Then the expression on her face indicates she is remembering Rob's comment, and she lets the nut drop back into the bowl. Duv enters.)

DUV. Where's Rob?

CALLIE. He left.

DUV. He did? Without saying goodbye? That prick. We were talking about maybe seeing a movie or something tomorrow night. *(Pause)* I guess I'll have to give him a call in the morning. *(Callie watches him closely. She picks up the game boxes)*

CALLIE. I'll be right back. *(Callie exits stage right. Duv pulls out a chair and sits. He's quiet for a few seconds, thinking. Then his expression changes slightly, indicating that his thoughts have shifted.)*

DUV. *(Raising his voice so Callie can hear him.)* Don't ever quote me on this, but tonight actually had its moments. For a half-assed affair that you pretty much just pulled out of your... *(Callie returns, carrying two bottles of beer.)*

CALLIE. You walking, or driving?

DUV. What do you think? *(Callie looks at him a second, then hands him one of the beers. She sits across from him. They sip their beers)*

DUV. So, did you two talk? Plan something else? *(Duv watches Callie, who sips from her beer again. She shakes her head "No". Duv looks away.)*

CALLIE. How's Jonathan? *(The question startles Duv. He takes his time answering)*

DUV. He's fine. He's good.

CALLIE. I thought maybe you'd bring him tonight.

DUV. Oh. Well, I didn't know how well he'd fit in. And you didn't mention him when you brought up the whole idea. *(Glancing at Callie)* We're not seeing each other as much these days. We're still... We're just not... Aren't we supposed to be talking about Lori? You haven't even asked me what I thought about her.

CALLIE. I don't want to know. Not right now. I don't want to talk about her.

DUV. Did something happen..? *(Then raises his hands in a whatever-you-say gesture. Beat)*

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CALLIE. So, was this a mutual decision? Between you and Jonathan? Or did one or the other of you make the suggestion?

DUV. I don't know. Mutual, I guess. Why are we talking about—

CALLIE. —It was you, wasn't it?

DUV. What? No! I just told you. It was mutual.

CALLIE. I liked him.

DUV. I like him, too. You don't have to talk about him in the past tense. *(Callie looks at Duv. She leans over and strokes the back of his head.)*

CALLIE. I wonder if there's any hope for either one of us.

(The lights fade on the central playing area as the lights come up on the stage left playing area. Rob sits in one of the two chairs, leafing through a magazine. Lori enters from stage left, crosses to the playing area, and paces back and forth, downstage of Rob. She takes no notice of him. Rob glances up at her fleetingly from his magazine, but does not recognize her right away. Lori glances at her watch, muttering under her breath. Rob turns a page in his magazine. Lori sighs. Rob looks up again and recognizes her for the first time.)

ROB. Lori? *(Lori turns to look at him.)*

ROB. Lori, it's Rob Lawrence. We met at Callie's awhile back?

LORI. Oh, yeah. Yes, of course. *(Rob stands and Lori crosses to him. They shake hands. Lori does not seem to be especially happy to see him.)*

LORI. I'm sorry, I'm just a little distracted. It's good to see you again.

ROB. Yeah, you too! How've you been?

LORI. Good, I'm good. And you?

ROB. Fine. Staying busy.

LORI. Yeah. Always lots to do, it seems.

ROB. Oh, yeah. *(Both smile at each other. Out of things to say.)*

LORI. It's been one of those days, you know? I saved up most of my errands for today. I get in the car, which I don't drive that often—I usually take the bus or walk—and I'm sitting at a stoplight, checking my list. All of a sudden, the car jerks and rattles like there's a rock or something clattering around in the engine, and it stops. I had a hell of a time getting it started again. The light's green, and people behind me are honking. What is it with people, anyhow? They can see you're having

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car trouble, can't get going. And they somehow think honking and yelling is going to fix the problem.

ROB. Yeah. Some people are jerks.

LORI. Finally, it starts again. My heart's thudding like crazy, just like that rock in the engine. Anyway, here I am, now. Nothing crossed off my list, but at least I was able to get the car here under its own power. I didn't have to pay to get it towed.

ROB. I'm sorry. I know that's a pain in the ass.

LORI. Yeah, thanks. How about you?

ROB. Just in for servicing. I had a coupon. Fifteen bucks off. I'm a sucker for a discount. ...So, did they say how long they thought it'd be?

LORI. No. He said he'd try to squeeze me in. It's Saturday, though. I'm sure there are lots of jobs ahead of me. I'm more worried about what the problem might be.

ROB. Well, maybe it's not too serious. It may have sounded worse than it actually is. Maybe it's... It probably isn't really a rock in the engine.

(Lori studies him solemnly for a minute)

LORI. I'm guessing mechanics isn't your field of expertise. *(They both laugh)*

ROB. Not so much, no.

LORI. It's not a new car. Doesn't have a huge amount of miles on it though. I bought it from my aunt. I'm good about checking the oil and transmission fluid regularly. But I'm wondering if I might have a leak.

(Rob gestures to the chair next to the one in which he was sitting. Lori sits, and he sits in his chair, as well. He looks down at the magazine he still holds, then tosses it on the table between the chairs. Both of them look around the room.)

ROB. Do you live nearby?

LORI. Over on South Steed Court. You?

ROB. We live in Grammercy. By the gardens.

LORI. Oh. I've driven through there. It's beautiful.

ROB. Yeah. We like it a lot. *(Pause)* So, how's Callie these days? I haven't seen her in a month or more. *(Lori looks surprised)*

ROB. You guys still work together, right?

LORI. I see her now and then. We aren't in the same department.

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ROB. Oh. So... oh. (*Uncomfortable pause*)

ROB. So... What kind of errands?

LORI. What? Oh. You know. Groceries, the bank. A work-out. I joined a gym the week I moved here, and I've only been twice. Today was going to be my day to get back to a routine. What did you mean, "Oh?"

ROB. Huh?

LORI. Just a second ago, you said, "Oh." After you asked about Callie.

ROB. ... Well, I thought, maybe... I don't know. Like I said, I've been out of touch. I knew you'd just moved here, and she was, well, trying to help you get a foothold. I didn't mean anything. Just... "Oh."

LORI. (*Smiling*) You dance very well.

ROB. What?

LORI. Dancing around, trying not to say more than you think you should. It's okay. I pretty much had it figured out midway through dinner that night. The poker game only confirmed it. (*Rob looks warily at Lori. He still isn't sure if she knows.*)

LORI. A set-up. She was thinking she might have a little crush on me, and was trying to find out if it might have been reciprocal. (*Pause. Rob laughs nervously. Lori laughs easily. Rob laughs again, this time less nervously.*)

ROB. Oh. Okay. So... I guess you aren't.

LORI. Aren't what?

ROB. That way. ...Lesbian.

LORI. (*Beat*) Oh, no. I'm gay.

ROB. Oh.

LORI. I thought you meant I wasn't attracted to Callie.

ROB. No, no, I just thought maybe you—

LORI. —She's nice. But, no. You know. She's not who I'm... Well, you know. That's what made it so awkward. Working at the same place. Avoiding each other while trying not to make it seem like we're avoiding each other.

ROB. Oh. Yeah.

LORI. So, we do that exaggerated politeness thing now, the overly sincere greeting whenever we bump into each other: "Well, *hi!* Great to see you again! How ya *doing?*" (*Sighs*) I'm sure she hates me.

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(The lights simultaneously come up on the center playing area, where Callie sits, talking on the phone, and the lights also come up on the stage right playing area, where Duv is standing, talking on his cell phone. They are speaking to each other. Their conversation overlaps with Lori's and Rob's.)

CALLIE. *(Into the phone)* I hate her.

DUV. *(Into the phone)* You don't hate her.

ROB. I'm sure she doesn't hate you.

CALLIE. I do. I hate her.

DUV. Okay. You hate her. Feel better?

CALLIE. No.

LORI. I really wish we could be friends.

ROB. She's a terrific person.

CALLIE. I would like for her to have an infestation of ugly, painful boils. All over her face.

DUV. Just because she doesn't want to go out with you?

LORI. How do you maintain a friendship after you've let someone know you don't want to date them?

ROB. It can be done.

CALLIE. I know. I can't really blame her.

ROB. It just takes time.

DUV. Blame her lack of good taste.

LORI. On the other hand...

CALLIE. Thank you, Sweetie.

LORI. The problem with being friends...

CALLIE. You just feel so stupid and ugly after you take that huge risk to let somebody know you're interested in them...

LORI. ...is that when you *do* meet someone you're attracted to...

CALLIE. ...and they shoot you down.

LORI. ...it just opens up the wound all over again. There's your friend, watching you with your new love interest...

CALLIE. It's even worse when they try to soften the blow.

LORI. ...smiling on the outside, acting all happy for you...

CALLIE. With things like, "Oh, it's not you, it's me. I'm just not ready for a relationship."

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LORI. ...at the same time, thinking, “What’s so special about *her*?”

DUV. Yeah. Or, “You deserve somebody special. And I’m sorry I just can’t be that for you.”

LORI. “What’s she got that I don’t have?”

ROB. And you *never* want the answer to *that*.

CALLIE/LORI. (*Unison*) Exactly! (*Rob cranes his neck as though he’s looking at something a good distance away. He stands.*)

ROB. It looks like I’m done. They’re pulling my car around.

CALLIE. Let’s talk about something else.

LORI. Oh. Well, good. At least one of us is going to get sprung.

DUV. Okay. What do you want to talk about?

ROB. It was really nice, running in to you again.

LORI. Oh, me, too. You made a little of the wait go faster. (*Rob starts to exit to the left. He pauses*)

CALLIE. How’s Jonathan?

DUV. Fine.

ROB. (*Turning back*) You know what? Come with me. Let’s find out how much longer they think it’ll be on your car.

CALLIE. Just “fine?”

LORI. Why?

DUV. Yeah. Fine. What is your obsession with him, anyway?

ROB. Because if it’s going to be awhile, then I want to take you to lunch. And we’ll do your grocery shopping.

CALLIE. What is your *lack* of obsession with him?

LORI. I couldn’t ask you to do that.

ROB. You’re not asking. I’m offering. Come on. (*Lori stands, and both she and Rob exit left.*)

DUV. What’s that supposed to mean?

CALLIE. You guys broke up, didn’t you?

DUV. It... It wasn’t working out. We weren’t—

CALLIE. —You broke up with *him*.

DUV. Why do you always assume—

CALLIE. —Because I’m always right. In fact, if I were to call Jonathan, I bet he’d say he really thought the two of you had something. (*Beat*) He

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really liked you. I could tell. I watched how he watched you that night at the barbecue. *(Beat)* He's a nice guy. Attractive. Funny.

DUV. Then *you* date him! Okay?

CALLIE. *(Sighs)* Duv... Sweetie, you have got to get over these feelings you have for—

DUV. —I'm supposed to take romantic advice from you? Because *you're* so clearly living the happily ever after?

CALLIE. Rob loves Andrew. And here you are, letting amazing guys like Jonathan slip right out of your life, because none of them can measure up to this, this ideal you've created.

DUV. I'm not going to have this conversation.

CALLIE. An ideal guy that you can't have. This image that's even bigger than Rob himself.

DUV. Cal, this is none of your damn business. You don't know what you're talking about.

CALLIE. Even Rob isn't as perfect as the Rob you've imagined. *(Duv disconnects the call and hurls his cell phone onto the chaise. Callie, realizing he's hung up on her, clicks off her phone and sits thinking. Duv paces angrily for a moment. Then he grabs his cell phone and exits right. Lori enters from left and crosses to the lower center playing area. As she sits, the lights come up on her. She opens a laptop and begins to type. Several seconds pass and then Callie rises and crosses down to this area. She stands a moment, watching Lori work. Then she simulates a knock on the door.)*

CALLIE. Hey, there. *(Lori turns to look at her.)*

LORI. Oh, hi!

CALLIE. You're working late.

LORI. Yeah, you know... I've been in meetings all day. I thought maybe I could actually get some work done now.

CALLIE. Oh. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to—

LORI. *(Rising)* --No, no please! That came out horribly wrong. I've been sitting here, mostly sulking, actually, thinking how they have all these mandatory meetings, and meanwhile, the work is just piling up on my desk. Everybody still wants all this crap done on time, without taking into account that... *(Pause)* ...All you've really done is to

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interrupt my little pity party. Come in. Sit. I'm not going to get to any of this shit tonight, anyway. *(The two women look at each other in silence for a few seconds. Lori gestures to the other chair, and Callie crosses and sits. Lori takes her own seat again)*

CALLIE. I just... I was on my way out, and I saw your light on in here. I won't stay but a minute. I just wanted to clear away all the awkwardness. Metaphorically sweep everything off the desk and start over. *(Lori studies Callie for a moment. She is trying to decide whether to feign ignorance or to acknowledge the tension that has existed between them. Finally, she smiles and nods.)*

CALLIE. I was having a conversation with somebody on the phone last night. Well, it was Duv, actually. We... we had words. One of those hot topics that I should know better than to bring up. I was lecturing and he was ignoring and all of a sudden, I realized that I probably should be listening to what I was saying even more than he should. Well, none of that matters. The point is, after we hung up, I got to thinking.

LORI. I'm sorry I've been avoiding you.

CALLIE. I don't want you to apologize.

LORI. I loathe myself for that kind of behavior. I want to be honest and above board in all my relationships. But now and again, something comes along. It catches me off-guard, and I get all weasely. I hate that about myself.

CALLIE. I understand. It's probably better that you were avoiding me. I wouldn't have been a very nice person to be around the last few weeks. I was... Well, you don't need to know what I was. *(Beat)*

LORI. I wonder if it's different for heteros. Probably not, but it seems like it ought to be. Somehow, a woman turning down a guy's advances, or a man taking a woman's number and then never calling her seems... less momentous. Not as hurtful. Which is ridiculous, of course. *(Pause)* When you're gay, you look at another gay person, and you think, "Okay, we're part of an inner circle. We already understand. So, you reach out to that person, and she says, "Uh, yeah. Thanks, but no thanks..."

CALLIE. "We both want the same thing, but I don't want it from *you*."

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(The bluntness of this statement catches them both off-guard, and now there is an awkward silence. Callie rises and paces nervously, then turns to Lori)

CALLIE. I just... I realized, we can either be enemies, or we can be friends. There's no casual acquaintanceship possible. Nothing left in the middle.

LORI. *(Pause)* Then I pick 'friends.' *(Beat. Callie nods)*

LORI. I really am not going to get to any of this work tonight. You want to grab a drink?

CALLIE. I can't, actually. I already have plans. I just... Well, this is a good example, actually.

LORI. What do you mean?

CALLIE. Things we can't get weirded-out about. I can't take back the fact that I had a romantic interest in you. I can't even take back the fact that it's going to color everything each of us says and does, at least for awhile. But, if we over-analyze these things, it'll make us crazy, and we might as well go back to the avoidance thing. *(Sitting)* If I give you a birthday card, or if I offer to pick up the check for dinner sometime, I don't want you reading anything more into it than that. It's just a card. It's just a dinner. And if either of us turns down an invitation like, say, for a drink from the other, it's because we really do have other plans. Or because we simply don't want to grab a drink right then. Not because either of us is upset. Or playing games. We both have to take each other at our word. Okay? *(Lori is a little dazed by this frankness. She studies Callie, then nods)*

LORI. Okay. *(The lights fade on the down center area as they rise on both the stage left and stage right playing areas. Duv is seated in the area stage left, talking on a cell phone again. Rob is seated stage right also talking on a cell phone. Though it initially appears they are talking to each other, they are having separate phone conversations entirely.)*

DUV. *(Into the phone)* I don't know... It's kind of a crappy evening. It's cold, and it's rainy.

ROB. *(Into the phone)* You always say that.

DUV. And there's some work I've been putting off.

ROB. Please don't give me that crap about working late.

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DUV. What time were you thinking?

ROB. Eddie heard them last night, and he said they're amazing. They're only playing through this weekend.

DUV. Yeah. I just... I don't like that place. It's jammed, and it's always smoky. Last time I was there, I just about coughed up a lung afterward.

ROB. Just give it a shot. If we don't like them, we don't have to hang around.

DUV. You say that now, but I know how this works.

ROB. I don't want to go without you. What fun would that be?

DUV. We'll get there, and I'll be miserable, and you'll keep saying, "Just give it ten more minutes..."

ROB. Andy...

DUV. ...And I'll drink too much...

ROB. I don't drink too much! I drink just the right amount.

DUV. And at eleven or so, you'll say, "Now, admit it. You enjoyed yourself."

ROB. I get a nice, controlled buzz going, and then we go home, and I tear your clothes off.

DUV. And because I'm drunk, I'll say, "Yeah, it was okay."

ROB. You always like that part. Don't tell me you don't.

DUV. And it's only after I pour myself into bed and wake up in the morning with a blinding headache and my ears still ringing, that I remember what a horrible night it really was.

ROB. Yeah, I know we could skip the going-out part. That's not the point.

DUV. I'm not going to do that this time.

ROB. Okay. No, it's fine. I'm just going to find a movie to watch, and get a pizza, and we'll curl up on the couch.

DUV. I don't want you coming over.

ROB. Well, how long?

DUV. Because the place is a mess. And because... Well, just because.

ROB. I swear, it's like you're trying to avoid me

DUV. I am not trying to avoid you. I just want to spend a quiet evening alone.

ROB. Well, I'm still getting a pizza.

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DUV. Mike, you call me last-minute, you want me to go clubbing...

ROB. Because I wanted you to hear them, too. What fun is it, going by myself?

DUV. It has nothing to do with you, I just don't want to do it.

ROB. Duv?

DUV. Mike...

ROB. Well, yeah, I guess I could ask him...

DUV. And because I'm beat. We'll do something tomorrow night, okay?

ROB. Yeah, I know. I know you do. Okay. But only if you promise you won't work too late.

DUV. Yes. Tomorrow. I promise.

ROB. I love you. Bye. *(Clicking off, then dialing a new number)*

DUV. Seven, I guess. You want to try that new place on Momart?

...Yeah. Oh, maybe we should make it six, then. Everybody's going to be checking it out, and it'll be jammed if we—oh, hold on. I've got another call coming in. Hold on a minute. *(Clicking over to the new call)*
Yeah?

ROB. Hey, Duv, it's Rob.

DUV. Hey, Robbie! *(The lights begin to fade on the stage right area)*

ROB. I know it's last-minute, but what are you doing tonight? *(The lights fade entirely on the stage right area, leaving Rob in total darkness. He exits)*

DUV. *(Just the slightest hesitation)* I... I don't have any plans. Why? ... Yeah? They are? What time? *(Glancing at his watch)* Sure. Where should we meet? ... Sounds great. See you there! *(Clicking off that call; thinking for a few seconds before clicking back to his original call.)*

Mike? Yeah, look; I gotta go. ... Yeah, it was. Think about Momart's, or someplace else, and I'll see you tomorrow early, and we'll firm up the plan.

...Yeah. Bye. *(Duv hangs up. He sits a moment, thinking, evaluating the level of guilt he should be feeling. As the lights fade on stage left, he exits. The stage is in darkness for a few seconds, then the lights come up on the down central area. It remains vacant for a few seconds, then Rob enters. He crosses to the down central playing area, but does not sit. He is obviously in an agitated state, and he paces. His clothing is rumpled, hair askew, shirt halfway unbuttoned and only half tucked-in.)*

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ROB. *(Calling to someone offstage)* Excuse me! Have you heard anything about..? *(Listens to an unheard response, nodding vigorously)* Okay. Yeah. Well, please, as soon as you know anything. Anything at all. *(Rob's shoulders slump. His hands clench and unclench at his side. He looks around, then crosses and sits. He glances back and forth, as though looking up and down a hallway. He rubs his hands on his pants legs. He gets to his feet after a moment and resumes pacing. A few seconds pass and Callie enters, rushing to his side.)*

CALLIE. Hey. *(They hug very tightly and do not break apart for several seconds)*

ROB. Thanks for coming. Especially at this hour. I... I just...

CALLIE. *(Patting his back)* Of course. No question. *(Rob clenches her tightly, and for several seconds, they do not speak. Finally they break apart again.)*

CALLIE. How is he?

ROB. I don't know. I... I think he's... He seemed a little better, I think, by the time we got to the emergency room.

CALLIE. What time was that?

ROB. I'm not sure. A little less than an hour ago, I guess. Seems longer.

CALLIE. *(Nodding as she guides Rob to the chairs)* Let's sit. *(They do so)* How are you?

ROB. I, I don't... I'm... fine. Scared. I called his dad. He didn't want me to, didn't want to worry him, but I thought... I just thought...

CALLIE. You did the right thing.

ROB. He'll be pissed when he finds out.

CALLIE. Let him.

ROB. I called Lori. She... We...

CALLIE. *(Nodding)* We drove together. She's parking the car. I don't think I even let her come to a full stop before I opened the door and sort of rolled out.

ROB. I called Duv. But then I remembered...

CALLIE. Yeah, he's not back until Sunday. He left me the number. I'll call him in the morning.

ROB. No, don't. He'll jump on the first plane and come right back. He doesn't need to do that. Unless...

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CALLIE. It's going to be fine. You said Andy seemed better when you last saw him?

ROB. You know how he is. Even as they were lifting him on to the gurney, he was apologizing for making people fuss over him. *(Small nervous laughs from both of them)*

CALLIE. So, tell me what happened... *(Lori enters, crossing to them rapidly. Rob and Callie rise as she approaches.)*

LORI. There you are. *(Hugging Rob)* What do we know?

ROB. He's back there. A doctor talked to me for a few minutes. Asked me some questions. Said somebody would be back in awhile.

LORI. *(Digging in her pocket for change)* You want some coffee? Or something?

ROB. I had some awhile ago. I threw it up.

CALLIE. Must have been really good coffee. *(Guiding Rob back to the chairs)* Let's sit. *(All three of them sit)*

LORI. So, what happened?

ROB. Nothing. We'd been asleep since around eleven. Then I woke up. I don't know why. Andy hadn't said anything. Maybe his breathing was different, maybe that was it. I looked over at him. He was staring at the ceiling. I said, "What's wrong?" He said he couldn't move his arm. It was like someone was sitting on him. He was sweating like crazy. I tried to help him sit up. I called 911. When he didn't protest, when he didn't say he thought he'd be all right, that's when I really got scared.

CALLIE. Sweetie...

LORI. Was he in pain?

ROB. I... I don't think so. By the time the ambulance got there, he could move again, but they didn't want him walking. Made him go out on a stretcher.

CALLIE. He was fine when you went to bed?

ROB. Yeah, I think so. He didn't say anything. *(Sighs)* He's been working so much lately. *(Rob rubs his face. Callie and Lori, sitting on either side of him, look at each other)*

LORI. Stress, probably. Maybe just a panic attack. My uncle had those. Believe it or not, the symptoms can be very similar to a heart att... *(Regretting what she has started to say)*

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CALLIE. *(Hastily)* Andy takes better care of himself than anybody I know. He's always working out. I wish I had his waistline.

LORI. *(To Rob)* Didn't you tell me the two of you have been talking about a trip to Australia?

ROB. New Zealand.

LORI. Yeah. See, that's what needs to happen. Get him out of that damn office. Park his butt in a beach chair somewhere.

ROB. That look in his eyes... I honestly thought he was leaving me. Or that *he* thought he was. *(Beat)*

CALLIE. He was scared. And you were, too. I'm sure he's going to... We can't start second-guessing. Making ourselves crazy. I know it's hard, but... *(During Callie's line, Rob's attention is drawn offstage right. He rises.)*

ROB. There she is. That's her. *(Running stage right)* Doctor? Doctor! How is he? What did you find out? *(Rob exits stage right. Callie and Lori have also risen. They take a few steps right as if to follow Rob, but then stop. There is a pause as they watch Rob, offstage, consult with the doctor. Callie turns to Lori.)*

CALLIE. Thank God. I was just about to start spouting every useless platitude in the book.

LORI. I was an idiot. Trying to make it seem like it might be nothing, and then bringing up the idea of a heart attack.

CALLIE. It's what we were all thinking.

LORI. Yeah, but I'm the one who opened my big yap and—

CALLIE. —Don't. He was barely listening to us, anyway. We were here. That's all that matters. *(Beat)* Do you really think it could be..? *(Both women pace.)*

LORI. Maybe.

CALLIE. He's only thirty seven. Thirty eight, maybe?

LORI. Maybe there's a family history. I don't know. Some people do all the right things. Eat well. Exercise. And still...

CALLIE. *(Shaking her head)* No. Not Andrew. It has to be something else. It just has to. *(Callie crosses and sits. Lori studies her for a few seconds. She would very much like to comfort her, somehow. She lifts one hand, then allows it to drop to her side once more. She turns away.)*

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CALLIE. The very first time I ever had chocolate pudding was in a hospital. My grandma had had an operation, and we came to visit her. They wouldn't let children go upstairs, so while my mom went to see her, my dad took my brother and me to the cafeteria. You know how they always joke about hospital food being awful? That pudding was delicious. I've never had chocolate pudding as good as that anyplace since.

LORI. Have you ever been a patient in the hospital?

CALLIE. *(Shaking her head)* Not unless you count being born in one. You? *(Lori nods. She crosses and sits, leaving a gap between herself and Callie.)*

LORI. Car accident when I was fourteen. Another car ran a stoplight and broadsided us. Dislocated my shoulder. Concussion.

CALLIE. That's horrible!

LORI. I don't remember how long I had to be in the hospital. A week or more. I had to pee into a bedpan. I hated that. Everything is embarrassing when you're fourteen, but peeing into a plastic, horseshoe-shaped thing while a nurse looks on is bottom-of-the-barrel degrading.

CALLIE. You're kidding me!

LORI. It took forever. This one nurse, in particular, was so grumpy. "I don't have all day!" she'd bark at me. Which, of course, just made the process last even longer. *(Callie stares open-mouthed at Lori. After a few seconds, she snickers, then claps a hand over her mouth)* I'd pee just a little, and it would make this noisy, splattering sound, and so I'd stop. *(Callie laughs again. Lori, as she relates the story, also starts to laugh.)* It just seemed so unladylike, you know? So then, it would take me like five minutes before I could relax enough to do any more. And there'd be that splattering noise again, and I'd stop. It would go on and on like that: Splatter, stop. Splatter, stop. I bet it took me thirty minutes to finish. *(Laughter continues)*

CALLIE. Couldn't you get up and go to the bathroom? Your legs were okay, right?

LORI. Oh, absolutely. It was some dumb hospital rule, or something. Probably to do with their insurance. I guess they thought I might fall and

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sue them. To this day, I have a bashful bladder. I can't be part of a cluster of women who caravan to the ladies room together.

CALLIE. Oh, I know! Wee-weeing is not supposed to be a group activity!

LORI. I'll listen to whatever you need to tell me, but I don't want to do it while your drawers are down around your ankles! *(Pause as they compose themselves after laughing)*

CALLIE. So... That must have been a pretty serious accident. Were you with your family?

LORI. *(Shaking her head)* My best friend, Tracy Miller. Her mom was driving. She'd picked us up after field hockey practice. *(Pause; smiling)* Tracy was my first big crush. I never told her, of course. She was big into boys, and she would have freaked. So I pretended I liked boys, too. We'd hang out together, talking about Todd Bauer and Kermit Smythe. Yeah, *Kermit*. She liked everything about him, except his name. Todd was going to be *my* boyfriend. *(There is a long pause. Callie looks at Lori, who stares straight ahead.)*

LORI. It was Tracy's head that dislocated my shoulder. She was sitting on the side where the other car smashed into us. It launched her into me like a cannonball. *(Another long pause. Finally Lori turns to look at Callie.)* I wonder if the cafeteria serves chocolate pudding this time of night. *(Rob enters from stage right, crossing to them. They rise as he approaches.)*

ROB. They think he's going to be fine.

CALLIE. Thank God. *(They both sag with relief)*

ROB. They're going to keep him overnight, obviously. Probably run a couple of tests in the morning.

LORI. Do they have any idea at all?

ROB. She says she's almost certain it wasn't a heart attack. I guess they can tell. Angina, maybe. It could even just be exhaustion. He's sleeping now, can you believe it? I thought they'd given him something, but the doctor said he just fell asleep on his own. After everything that's happened! *(Beat)* I had to get him into a pair of pants, you know? He said, "I don't care what's wrong, I'm not leaving this house without a pair of pants on!" And now, he's sound asleep back there. In one of

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those stupid gowns that barely fastens in the back. Sleeping, and his butt's hanging out, and he doesn't even know. I should take photos.

CALLIE. He would kill you. *(Beat; thinking)* I've got my phone. We could take some pictures with that!

LORI. I don't believe this. You people are seriously disturbed.

ROB. You could e-mail them to me and I could print them out. We'd have a whole series of pictures of his ass taped on the bed railing for when he wakes up. I could say, "Honey, which one of these should go on the Christmas card this year?"

CALLIE. Or do one of those make-them-yourself calendars! Twelve different poses!

ROB. "The Back Side of Andrew!" *(They laugh, then grow quiet)*

ROB. You guys should go. I'm going to stay the night.

LORI. Can we bring you anything?

CALLIE. You'll need a ride tomorrow, won't you? You came in the ambulance?

ROB. Yeah. We'll work something out later. For now, I'm... I just want to thank you both for... for... *(Now that the crisis has passed, Rob is starting to lose control. Callie and Lori glance at each other, then at Rob)*

ROB. I thought he was going to die. I thought he was going to die.

CALLIE. *(Embracing him)* I know, Sweetie.

ROB. *(Starting to cry)* Oh, God. Oh, God.

LORI. *(Touching Rob's back)* It's going to be okay. He's going to be all right.

ROB. *(Crying)* I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to help. I just kept... I just kept... *(Rob continues to cry as Lori and Callie hold him. The lights fade on the lower central area. The lights come up on the stage right area. Duv enters, carrying a handful of mail. He is talking on his cell phone. He crosses into the area, sorting through his mail as he talks—and mostly listens—on the phone)*

DUV. *(Into the phone)* Uh-huh... When? Last Tuesday? ...She did? ...I don't know. Last month, maybe. ...Well, if you knew, then why did you ask? *(Tossing the mail onto the chaise)* ...Because I thought I had. ...Mom. Mom. Because there wasn't any reason to. That's what we have

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you for. You're like *information central*. (*Crossing down and looking out a "window" as he talks*) Why should I be the one to call? They're just as capable of picking up a phone and... No. No, I hate to be the one to break it to you, Mom, but your kids just aren't all that interested in each other's lives. (*Crossing up and sitting on the chaise*) Of course I love them. It's *not* a reflection of your parenting skills. I mean, do you and Aunt Ruth talk all that often? ...Uh-huh. Yeah. ...How many? Well, good for her. (*Losing interest in the conversation, he starts going through the mail again*) Sure. Mm-hm. No, of course I'm paying attention. She won two pots at bingo. Bunco, then. Anyway, two pots. ...She's what? Well, good for her. (*Looking up, he sees someone and beckons to them to come in*) Why not? If she wants to spend it on a day at the spa, why shouldn't she? (*Callie enters and crosses to stand by Duv. She listens to his end of the conversation.*) Yeah. Yeah, they arrived yesterday. They're beautiful. I'm looking at them right now. (*Shaking his head No at Callie*) You always know the perfect gift. And the check. You were way too generous. (*Shaking his head No at Callie*) You're right. It'll go right into the savings account. (*This time, it's Callie who shakes her head No*) Any-way, thank you so much. Tell Dad I said thanks, too. ...No, nothing too much. Just dinner with some friends. Callie, in fact. ...No, no special guy. ...Yeah, look, Mom, I'd better go. I still need to get ready. ...Uh-huh. Love you. ...Yeah, bye-bye. (*Hangs up; slumps into his chair*) Oh, Lord...

CALLIE. How is Mommy?

DUV. You heard most of the conversation. What do you think?

CALLIE. (*Kissing him on the forehead*) Poor Sweet Baby.

DUV. You know, I liked it better when she was in denial. Didn't want to know about dates or boyfriends. Was convinced it was just a phase I was going through. Now she sends me tons of clippings and magazine articles: Gay rights legislation. Some celebrity who's just come out of the closet. If it has even a remotely homosexual angle to it, she sends it along with a note attached: "Thought you'd find this interesting." If it's faggy, then she thinks I'm all over it.

CALLIE. Be grateful. She could've disowned you. Or stopped speaking to you. (*Duv gives her an "And that would be a bad thing?" gesture.*)

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CALLIE. I mean it. She could be *my* mom. (*Affecting a motherly voice*) “I could maybe believe you were a lesbian if you’d at least given men a try, first. You’ve had what... maybe six dates in your entire life? That’s like getting hold of half a dozen sour raspberries and deciding there’s no such thing as a sweet one. You’re not gay, you’re in denial. That’s all.”

DUV. Hey. You and I had at least six dates in high school! I took you to prom!

CALLIE. Yeah... I think she considers you one of those sour raspberries. She thinks you turned me.

DUV. Excuse me? I was the one desperately trying to keep you on the straight and narrow! Even to the point of denying my own inclinations!

CALLIE. Well, now I’m neither straight nor narrow. You might as well have saved yourself the trouble.

DUV. And you’ve never been happier. No, don’t thank me. (*Callie pulls a greeting card and envelope from her pocket*)

CALLIE. Do you want your gift now, or at dinner?

DUV. Uh... at dinner?

CALLIE. No. Now.

DUV. (*Taking the card and opening the envelope*) That was going to be my next guess. (*Looking at the card*) Oooh, a shirtless guy! (*Reading the inside of the card*) “I figured you’d like a six-pack for your birthday.”

Isn’t this the same card you gave me last year?

CALLIE. Same message. Different shirtless guy.

DUV. Yeah. It’s hard to go wrong with the classics.

CALLIE. Read the rest.

DUV. (*Looking at the card again*) “This entitles the bearer to a bottle of wine and a chat into the wee hours, a walk around the lake, a brunch on the Sunday of your choice at Crummonds...” (*Impressed; glancing at Callie*) Oooh! (*Reading again*) “...Two tickets to the next romantic comedy or slasher flick you wish to attend, plus a jumbo bucket of popcorn, one foot or back massage—but not both, and if it’s your feet, you have to wash them first--, the promise of the undersigned to marry you if we’re both still single at age fifty, or to be your maid of honor if you meet the man of your dreams before that time...” (*Turning to the back of the card*) “...The first dozen of my world famous oatmeal

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chocolate chip cream cheese cookies if I ever learn how to bake, and my unconditional love, friendship and support for the rest of our natural lives and beyond, except for those occasional days when one or the other of us is feeling really bitchy. Love, Callie.” *(Looking at her)* Oh, honey! Just what I wanted! And in my size and color, too!

CALLIE. That’s good, because I got it on sale, and it’s non-returnable. *(Looking at her watch)* We should go. The reservation’s at seven forty-five.

DUV. There’s what... seven of us?

CALLIE. Six. Lori can’t make it. They decided, last-minute, to send her to that conference in Minneapolis. She sends her regrets and love. Oh, and a present, too. It’s in my car.

DUV. Well, as long as there’s a present.

CALLIE. Gift whore.

DUV. Hey, it’s my day. I’m entitled. It’s all about me and the gifts people bring me. So, it’s Dodie and Steve, and Andrew and Rob, and you and me, then?

CALLIE. That’s right. You know, you should be honored. The boys planned their vacation to New Zealand around your birthday.

DUV. Which is how it should be.

CALLIE. I always forget how impossible you are each year. I’ll be glad when it’s tomorrow, and we don’t have to pretend we like you anymore.

DUV. *(Holding up her greeting card)* Ah, ah! I’ve got this, remember? This is going to keep you hopping for quite awhile.

CALLIE. So, put on whatever it is your mother gave you, and let’s go, okay?

DUV. Funny girl. *(As they start to exit)* Hey, I want to tell you something before we meet the others. *(Callie turns to look at Duv. He takes a deep breath)*

DUV. I met someone in Albuquerque. This guy. He’s... Well, his name’s Jordan. *(Callie studies Duv silently for a moment. Then she takes him by the arm and leads him back to the chaise and pushes him down. She sits beside him)*

DUV. You said the reservation’s at seven forty-five. We’ll be late.

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CALLIE. It's a restaurant. There's food and alcohol. They can keep themselves entertained if we're a few minutes late. So: Jordan.

DUV. I met him while I was doing research at the library.

CALLIE. Does he work there?

DUV. No. He was there on his lunch hour, looking at an exhibit. A friend of his was having a showing.

CALLIE. What does he do?

DUV. He's a buyer for a chain of clothing stores. *(The lights are fading)*

CALLIE. So, what happened? How did you get to talking?

DUV. I was printing out some stuff, and I was headed back to my cubicle. There was this watercolor on an easel that caught my eye, with these big slashes of green and yellow. I was looking at it when this voice over my shoulder said—

CALLIE. —What does he look like? Did you guys go on a date, or anything?

DUV. Will you just let me tell the story?

CALLIE. Sorry. I just can't believe you haven't said anything until now.

DUV. Well, I wasn't sure it *was* anything. But we've talked every day since I've been back, and—

CALLIE. —He's called you? And you don't think it means anything? More! Tell me more!

DUV. I will, if you'll just shut your yap for a minute... *(The last couple of lines are delivered in darkness. The next several lines are also delivered in darkness, and can begin immediately. Duv and Callie cross up to the central playing area where they are joined by Rob and Lori. All four sit at the table with drinks and cards.)*

LORI. Ginger.

ROB. The Professor.

CALLIE. Mary Ann.

DUV. The professor.

LORI. Statuesque.

ROB. Cute.

CALLIE. Sweet.

DUV. Sexy. *(The lights are coming up)*

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LORI. Self-confident. Conceited, even. Doesn't matter.

CALLIE. Oh, Mary Ann was every bit as sexy as Ginger. You could put her in that little gingham frock, but you couldn't cover up the sexiness.

LORI. Too sweet. Wholesomeness is boring.

CALLIE. Says you.

ROB. He was my first crush. When I was in sixth grade, I'd dash home from school every afternoon to catch the show at four o'clock. I lived for those episodes where he took off his shirt.

DUV. The perfect show for adolescent gays. You could sit and watch and fantasize, with your family right there in the same room. Your folks would think anything that moronic was bound to be safe.

CALLIE. It wasn't that moronic!

LORI. It was funny!

ROB. I still watch it sometimes. *(The others look at him in surprise)*

ROB. The Professor's still cute!

CALLIE. Okay, next question: How old were you when you knew? I think I was twelve. Maybe thirteen.

DUV. Eleven.

LORI. I think I always knew.

ROB. Twenty. *(The others look at him in surprise again)*

ROB. I'm serious! Julie Phillips and I went steady in the eighth grade!

DUV. Oh, please.

ROB. I went out with Kathy Haggerty and Jane McPherson freshman year. There was Frannie Somebody-or-other... In college, I dated Linda Baxendale. I had Thanksgiving dinner with her family one year.

LORI. Denial.

CALLIE. Overcompensation.

DUV. Stupidity.

ROB. That's where I met her little brother Hank.

DUV./CALLIE./LORI. *(Unison)* Ohhhh....

ROB. Nothing ever happened. He wasn't gay. He wasn't even all that cute. But there was something... I couldn't stop thinking about him.

CALLIE. *(Dreamily)* Marcie Laverty. She worked at The Dairy Cream. I spent so much money on ice cream that summer.

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DUV. Mr. Long, my algebra teacher.

LORI. Tracy Miller.

CALLIE. Oh, yeah. Your friend from field hockey... *(She stops herself abruptly)*

LORI. The oblivious objects of our affection. *(Callie glances at Duv, who studies his card earnestly)*

LORI. So, Rob, when did you meet Andrew? And when did you know he was the one?

ROB. It's such a stupid story. And such a cliché. There's no reason why it should ever have worked out. We—

DUV. —It was a bar. A club.

ROB. Yeah, Duv was with me. Our standard Friday night hangout back then. "Sessions." A real bit, but if you were queer, early twenties, and you wanted to dance, that was it. Too noisy, too crowded, too smoky...

DUV. *(Slight edge to his voice)* And yet, there he was. Your one true love. *(Callie, slightly nervous, puts her hand on Duv's hand. He yanks his away)*

ROB. All that. Duv and I had been dancing. *(Smiling at Duv)* He's a great dancer, by the way. So, Duv went off to the bathroom, and I was standing at the bar. This guy says, "You and your boyfriend make a really cute couple." The most transparent line in the world, of course. I'd done a little hash earlier, which always used to make me hostile for some reason, so I turn to this guy and say, "If you want to know if I'm available for fuck, then just ask, Queen Mary." *(Sheepishly)* I was a little drunk, too.

LORI. And that was Andrew?

ROB. God, no. It was just some poor jerk who'd had the misfortune to try and engage me in conversation. Well, he takes offense, for some reason, and flounces off. I hear this other voice behind me say, "You kiss your boyfriend with that mouth?" *That* was Andy.

LORI. Ah!

ROB. I whipped around, all prepared to let him have some of the same, and I find myself looking at the most incredible pair of green eyes I'd ever seen. Stopped me in my tracks for a few seconds. And then I said, "Mind your own business, asshole."

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LORI. Charming.

ROB. *(Nodding)* He said, “When you wake up tomorrow morning with a blinding hangover, and it takes every bit of willpower you own, just to roll over, and you see me lying there, smiling at you, please know that I will have overlooked your obnoxious behavior and your foul mouth just this once.”

CALLIE. That’s our Andy.

ROB. I was about to say, “Not in your wildest, luckiest dreams.” But the words never came.

DUV. I came back from the john and there was Rob, talking to this dude I’d never seen before. I asked him if he was ready to go, and he said—

ROB. *(As if back in that moment all over again)* --“I think I’m going to go home with this guy...” *(Pause. All four of them seem spellbound.)*

LORI. Your very own Professor.

ROB. *(Turning to look at Lori)* He is, isn’t he?

DUV. *(Shaking himself free of the spell)* I wasn’t going to say anything until later. Next week...

LORI. What?

DUV. I’ve accepted a job in Albuquerque. *(Callie stares at Duv. Lori and Rob react with surprise)*

ROB. When... When did this come up?

LORI. How come you haven’t said anything?

DUV. Things only fell into place a little while ago. I wasn’t even looking. But this job sort of presented itself.

ROB. Is that why you’ve made so many trips down there the last few months?

LORI. I thought that was for research.

DUV. Well, it was, mostly.

CALLIE. *(Quietly)* And Jordan.

DUV. I have to be there a week from next Monday.

LORI. That soon?

ROB. And you waited until now to tell us? Bastard!

DUV. It just came out of nowhere. I wasn’t looking, I wasn’t even going to take it. It’s sort of out of my field of expertise, but they seem to think I’m who they’re looking for... *(Looking at Callie)* ...and, it’s time.

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(Duv and Callie look at each other while Rob and Lori watch them. Rob gets to his feet and pulls Duv up out of his chair)

ROB. You big dummy. *(Hugging him hard)* Congratulations. I'm going to miss you like crazy, you big jerk.

(Rob continues to hug Duv, patting him on the back. Duv hugs him back, less enthusiastically. Callie looks down at her cards. The lights fade.)

END OF ACT ONE

THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS, ORDER A HARD COPY AT WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.NET