

TRACE

A ONE ACT DRAMA

BY
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(there is one loud, extended exultant male groan, made only once, then silence. Lights come up. Two bodies lie post-coital, exhausted, strewn head to toe on a bed in an apartment on the Upper Westside of Manhattan. Male is 28, unshaven, wiry and a New Yorker. Woman is 36, blonde, Southern and was once too attractive. A long moment before speaking)

WOMAN:

You mean you never smoke after sex?

MALE:

What?—Wha'd you....

WOMAN:

Smoke, do you ever after?

MALE:

(he laughs slightly)

Yeah I know what you....

(he laughs fuller. She starts to laugh with him)

WOMAN:

What? What'd I say now?

MALE:

Nothing. It's the uh....haven't you ever heard that old joke?

WOMAN:

What joke, what'd I say? Did I say something funny?

MALE:

Not really. It's just this, I think it's a Dangerfeld joke, it sounds like him.—A woman asks a man, it's definitely Dangerfeld, I can see his face saying it. A woman asks a man, do you ever smoke after sex? And he says, *"I don't know, I never looked."*

WOMAN:

Oh.—That's cute.

MALE:

Yeah well, it's Dangerfeld, it works better out of his face.

(he exhales heavily)

Woah my god, that was fun. Why you let me do that, why you do what you do, I don't know but I do so thank you for it.

WOMAN:

I don't get it. What does he mean, he doesn't look? He doesn't look at what?

MALE:

At himself. He doesn't look down at himself, at his penis, to see if it's smoking.

WOMAN:

Ooohhhh, I see, I get it. Ha, that *is* cute. I can see that, yeah.

(after a long pause, she moves to get up. He grabs her about the waist. They wrestle playfully)

MALE:

No you don't. I got you.

WOMAN:

I got to. *Hey!* Come on.

MALE:

Nope. I won't allow it.

WOMAN:

I gotta *go*. Seriously, come on....*Seriously*.

(finally he lets go. She gets up, puts on a shirt, underwear)

WOMAN:

I'm sorry. I don't know why, I just have to.

MALE:

If you don't know why, how do you know that you have to?

(he picks up a book and fiddles with it, talking distractedly)

WOMAN:

I don't know, I just do. I don't like to be that way.

MALE:

I know and that cracks me up. Given what you do for a living wage my dear, I would think it's your natural state. Like ape-ess on the Serengeti plan, at ease in her state of disrobement.

WOMAN:

That's my job, this's different. This's personal, that's not. How do you say it?

MALE:

Prurient commerce.

WOMAN:

Yeah, that. Nice and writerly. You'll go far making fun of me.

MALE:

With nothing coming these days, I'm not so sure I'm going anywhere.

WOMEN:

I am, don't you worry now. All those words you know, all those stories you tell me. Bless my heart, I do wonder why yer seeing me. I can't understand half of what we're talking 'bout most times. But there I am, nodding and smiling, repeating things you said so you think I'm following along. "Then he gunned the car? Then she balled for hours?" I get to doing that so it seems I'm there talking it too! Soon I can't understand half of what *I'm* saying!

MALE:

That's how you know you're making sense.

WOMAN:

Sometimes I think yer only dating me so you can get something out of me. That yer spending time hoping I'll say or do something funny or stupid *or both*, and you'll turn me into one of yer story tales. You can write it and tell everybody what it was like and they'll all be "is that what she was like really?" And you'll say "Yes she was. That's exactly what she was like."—Are you? Is that why yer dating me?

MALE:

(still distracted with the book)

Of course it is. The old writer ethos, the need to *live*, to experience all the vagaries that life offers as silage and pap for the pen. All that Hemingway, Fitzgerald romantic bullshit.

WOMAN:

(playfully pouty)

Is it true? Are you really just with me for the—pop and sludge?

MALE:

(finally looking up)

Noooo. I'm just *joshin'* ya. Come here.

(she obeys him)

Why not because who you are? The amazing soul, your beautiful, kind, even child-like heart. The exceptional almost illogical dichotomy of lust and purity, Eros and Thanatos you present.

WOMAN:

*Yeah!....*Is that a good thing?

MALE:

Depends who you ask....*Oui mademoiselle*, it's a very good thing. Besides, it's too pedestrian a story to tell. Call girl with a heart of gold. Wayward soul makes good on solemn pledge to small town mother. *A tale told too many times to tell*, if you'll forgive my alliterative solecism.

WOMAN:

You are forgiven.

MALE:

Do you have a story for me to tell? Something novel and unique, sui generis. One that'll make the multitudes feel and think and act and *unite!* Capturing and captivating, spellbinding enthralling throughout? ...Nope. Not possible.—It's not *you*, oh no, don't take it personally, you're wonderful, you're great.—There's just nothing like that anymore. There's nothing left that effecting. We're just not able to be effected like that anymore.

WOMAN:

So you say....I don't know, sometimes I fancy that's what it is, that's what you see in me. I mean why else?

MALE:

Of course, there is what you let me do to you. Speaking of which....

(he lunges out for her again, but she is too quick for his grasp)

WOMAN:

Hunh unh, no no. I have to get going soon. I have to meet my family.

(he only shakes his head. she lights a cigarette)

So how come you never smoke after sex?

MALE:

Because I don't smoke cigarettes.

WOMAN:

You smoke cigars, what's the difference?

MALE:

Cigarettes are a disgusting addiction. Cigars are a gentlemanly custom. A distinguishing affectation. What the French would call "*une poursuite noble.*"

WOMAN:

I don't know what that is and I don't care. Smoking is smoking and it's great. If you do it, you should do it after sex.

MALE:

I'm afraid I would feel my sex should be proportional to my smoke. I don't think I'll ever last long enough to earn a cigar.

WOMAN:

Stop, you're fine.

MALE:

Please don't say that.

WOMAN:

You are, you're really fine.

MALE:

No just don't use the word fine. A woman should never use *fine* to describe the sex she's just had. A Diet Coke she can say was fine. If she's just had the tuna, she can say *that* was fine.

WOMAN:

Okay, *nice* then.

MALE:

Fine or nice.—“That was nice. It was so nice.” It sounds like a compliment from your grandmother. It should not be used with sex. Too emasculating.

WOMAN:

Yer a silly goose.

MALE:

You've gotta stop using these words. Especially because of....

WOMAN:

What?....Oh stop, you're fine.

(he reacts)

Oh pooh.—You know I enjoy having sex with you.

MALE:

But you've never come.

WOMAN:

That's not true, I have from you many times. Thinking of you, fantasizing about you. Showering, with my dog toy or the drain stopper. Even almost once from just kissing you.

MALE:

But never *actually with* me.

WOMAN:

No....*It's okay*, I don't mind.

MALE:

After four months together, don't you think you should?

WOMAN:

It happens to me. You know I have trouble with that.

MALE:

With coming.

WOMAN:

With that, yeah.

MALE:

Say it, with coming.

WOMAN:

With *coming yes*, there okay?

MALE:

Thank you.—I can't last and you can't come. What a wonderful pair we make. It takes a lot of pressure off me. No matter what I do, no matter how long I go. But you have come with other men, other boyfriends that is. *Billy? Billy the Magnificent?*

WOMAN:

Very rarely. Only long-time fellas. Well—all except one I think.

MALE:

Oh yeah? One stranger, one one-timer was able to get the job done?

WOMAN:

I don't know if it was him or the E I took. I was pretty messed up.

MALE:

Is that the winning equation? Then we'll have to party more before we fool around.

WOMAN:

We could do that if you want. We can try E, or even a little coke.

MALE:

Sure, you're game.

(as she comes near, he grabs her affectionately about the waist)

That's the great thing about you, very permissive. You're beautiful, you have a great body. But a lot of women have great bodies and are beautiful. But your permissiveness, your willingness to try anything, to *do* anything anyone wants. You are, aren't you?

(giggling proudly, she nods child-like. they hug and release)

WOMAN:

Are you sure you won't come, it's gonna be a fun time?

MALE:

It's not my crowd.

WOMAN:

No no, it's just gonna be my family.

MALE:

Yeah I know.

WOMAN:

Come on, you liked my sister. You said so when you met her.

MALE:

No, I said I'd like to *sleep* with your sister. It's not the same thing.

WOMAN:

What's the difference?

MALE:

I don't need to like with whom I sleep. Though it does make things easier. I only need to *want* to sleep with her physically based on her aesthetics. Her beauty.

WOMAN:

I know what aesthetics means. Aesthetician remember.

MALE:

In training, yes I remember.

WOMAN:

I'm finishing soon.

MALE:

You're finishing slow, it's your recurring theme. Your sister is just a darker version of you.

WOMAN:

With bigger boobs.

MALE:

With certain enhanced qualities. Come to think, I wouldn't mind *having a go* as they say.

WOMAN:

Then why don't you come tonight, I just might let you.

MALE:

Then I'd have to talk to her. You know I can't get past her whole, "Y'all wrong, y'all so wrong" line of *speechifying*.

WOMAN:

Oh pooh, she's not that bad. She was drunk. She gets that way when she drinks.

MALE:

"Y'all doan belee dat. Y'all love Jesus too."

WOMAN:

Come on, I told you I don't like—

MALE:

"You jews ain bad folk. Juss a lil uppity thas all." Sorry, that was a little too much to take on a fifth date. Let alone our twenty-fifth. But, look on the bright side—I didn't slap her.

WOMAN:

They only come once a year.

MALE:

That's better than you do with me....She was here at *Christmas*, it's March.

WOMAN:

Yes once a year! Once last year and once this.

MALE:

That's twice in four months. Too much for any self-respecting Jew boy.

WOMAN:

But my Mama and my lil brother are here this time.

MALE:

Is he allowed to cross State lines again now?

WOMAN:

You stop that. That was long ago.

MALE:

He's twenty-two, how long ago can that be?

WOMAN:

The first was four years ago when he was still a minor. And the last was for breaking parole on the first one. It wasn't fair really. Those parole rules never make any sense to me. How's he supposed to know that fella's a drug dealer? He wasn't wearing a sign or nothing.

MALE:

Wouldn't it be easier if they did. He was buying drugs off him, he knew he was a drug dealer.

WOMAN:

They all look the same down there now, part hip-hop, part gangster what not. Everybody's wearing a baseball cap, everybody's got the same gold chain around his neck.

MALE:

Babe, you told me he was there *buying*—

WOMAN:

You talk to people. It's just *talk*. That's what we do down home. We go till the roosters crow if you let us. It's our entertaining. All of a sudden some cop comes up—

MALE:

He was buying drugs off him!...He knew he was a drug dealer

(she goes back to combing her hair. long pause)

So the gangster punk has come to meet the godfather and join the *carnivalé*.

WOMAN:

(still affected)

It's his first time.

MALE:

He'll love New York, it's the home office of vice. All misanthropes have to do their time here at some point. If only for a brief flash, to partake of the human dramedy on display. Your brother'll fit right in, there're plenty of avenues for his fancies.

(pause, noticing her mood)

What?

WOMAN:

It's my family.

MALE:

(pause)

Yeah it is....I'm sorry.

WOMAN:

I'm not sorry. I love my family.

MALE:

That's not what I meant.

WOMAN:

Some people's families are all strict and by the book and when they all get together in one room, they can't stand to be near each other. They can't talk or say anything to each all. Sitting around with their chitchat, not saying anything meaningful to one another. That's not my family, we ain't nothing like that. When we get together we laugh for hours. At ourselves mostly, how stupid we are, but laughing for hours all the same....I miss it....I miss 'em awful.

MALE:

(pause)

I meant I was sorry for what I was said—not sorry that they were your family.

WOMAN:

Oh.—Okay. I don't mind.

MALE:

I understand that you wouldn't mind, but I didn't mean that.

WOMAN:

It doesn't matter.

MALE:

It *does* matter. It would matter, if I meant it that way. Don't say it like you don't believe me.

WOMAN:

I didn't.

MALE:

Yes you did. You don't, don't you? You don't believe me.

(she responds with a shrug)

You don't know if you believe me or not? It's a simple yes or no question. Either you believe me or you don't.

WOMAN:

It's not that simple.

MALE:

Yes it *is* that simple. You know what you feel. You know what you think.

WOMAN:

I don't.

MALE:

Oh that's crap, you just don't want to say it. You've haven't got the guts. You can't even follow through on this. You never stand up for yourself. You can't just once tell me the truth, the hurtful awful, honest-to-god truth!

(she doesn't respond, she just looks downwards)

I think you know. And I think you don't believe me.

WOMAN:

I've gotta go soon.

MALE:

You'll forgive me if I don't join you.

WOMAN:

I didn't 'spect you to.

(she moves into the bathroom to put away the brush, pause)

MALE:

Did your other boyfriends join you when your family was in town?

WOMAN:

I don't have any other boyfriend.

MALE:

I know, supposedly. But in the past, my predecessors, were they all chummy with *la familia*?

WOMAN:

I don't know, some. It depended. Some guys met my family, visited with them. It's a Southern thang they do. If they're fatuating on a woman, they come to meet her family.

MALE:

Fatuating, huh? Hmmm.

(she returns as he intimates towards the bed)

Even before....

WOMAN:

Sure before, of course before. But I had one boyfriend for a long time so there weren't many.

MALE:

Again the *infamous* Billy, paragon of Southern noblese oblige. Your one untouchable.

WOMAN:

You make him famous, I don't. Yer just jealous of him.

MALE:

I'm jealous of his position in your heart.

WOMAN:

I don't think that's the position you worry about so much.

MALE:

Ah ha, well done! Learning fast. Did the redoubtable Billy *pilgrimage* to Multrie Georgia?

WOMAN

Oh no, it's a way long way from Multrie to Atlanta. At least a four hour drive.

MALE:

It's a way *longer* way from New York to Multrie. This guy couldn't travel a few measly hundred miles to meet the matriarch on the ancestral plantation.

WOMAN:

Plantation, sure. That was it.

MALE:

Trailer park?

WOMAN:

No not quite that. But not much more. It was a house sorta. With a dirt path and a screened in porch with big holes in the screen cause my brother used to run through it.

MALE:

Couldn't he find the door?

WOMAN:

No that wasn't it. I don't know, just to see if he could I guess.

MALE:

Maybe it didn't have a door?

WOMAN:

No I tell ya, he just like ramming through it, mashing his head some. It had panels 'bout six feet wide and when Mama would call him to dinner, he'd come running fast as he could and jump right into one of them panels. And sometimes he'd get through, he'd just ball right through! But other times he wouldn't make it. *Ha!* It'd be so funny. He'd be thrown back into the dirt there and we'd have the boy shape dent in the screen like in an old-time cartoon.

MALE:

Dat *wascally* wabbit.

WOMAN:

Oh lawd, you can't imagine the ruckus it'd cause. Eventually he'd recover from the beating the screen gave 'im and the worse one Mama'd give 'im after, and he'd go at it again, always getting through on the second try at the same spot. My, it was so funny watching him.

MALE:

I can't imagine why you moved to Atlanta. Hell, I'm ready to drive all night meeself.

WOMAN:

Oh it wasn't that bad, just small thas all. Only about six hundred people in the whole county. And I had some boys *who did*. Some who would do just about anything to make me happy.

MALE:

Oh really?

WOMAN

Yes. They'd down right worship and adore me.

MALE:

And how could they not? You have the amazing screen bustin' brother.

(he touches her softly. they hug tenderly)

I'm sorry.

WOMAN

I know.

MALE

I am. I really am.

(she hugs him harder, lets go and moves away)

True Southern gentry, your clients. When Tennessee Williams called them Gentleman callers, I don't think he envisaged modern-day escorting. Maybe he did, he *was* ahead of his time in debasing and abusing women.

WOMAN:

I don't know about that.

MALE:

No but you do know a bit about the commerce. It's a nice euphemism.

WOMAN:

What's that mean?

MALE:

It's a sweet way of saying something shitty. Brave baby, moving to the Big town, Hotlanta after high school. Autonomy, free meals, plenty o' *activity*. What more could a girl ask for?

WOMAN:

A little affection from time to time.

(his exaggerated nod implies the "ahhhh" not spoken)

MALE:

Now look at you ensconced comfortably in a two and a half on the Upper West Side. Among the arrivistes and nouveau. You've probably *danced* with half of 'em. Certainly they'd want you to beneath their Polo logos and flat-front pants. Desiccated soft tissue under flawless masks and uniforms.—You've come a long way baby from Jeff Davis town. Mazel tov.

WOMAN:

It's not what you think. It wasn't that bad down there. I wasn't a streetwalker, there wasn't any sex or nothing. I was an escort, just what the word means. Some lonely old men who wanted company for dinner or a movie. It was all very sweet most times.

MALE:

Like soft porn.

WOMAN:

It was! Oh what do you know. It was fine, I enjoyed it. Better than now. I got to go places. Restaurants I'd never've been to or've been able to afford. Movies and shows in town. Neil Diamond at the Fox. Dom Deluoise, Jerry Van Dyke! I never laughed so hard in all my life. I went to *museums* before you.

MALE:

The collection at the Hard Rock doesn't count as a museum.

WOMAN:

Ha ha.—And yes it does. That's all there is down there besides. Stone Mountain and the Underground. If it don't count, then fifteen of General Lee's favorite places to make water is all it's good for.—I got to travel. I went to the islands, Hilton Head and Key West.

MALE:

You in a skimpy bikini.

WOMAN:

Me in a very skimpy bikini. I even got to buy a couple if I didn't bring the *right* ones. Yes sir, it was fun. I never had the slightest problem, not once. But I had strict rules about who I would go with and who I wouldn't. They knew that. They were always concerned like that.

MALE:

Your pimps.

WOMAN:

They *weren't* pimps.

MALE:

No, they just set you up with men for money.

WOMAN:

Yeah. It was a nice organization.

MALE:

Like Fresh Air Fund or the Red Cross. Or the Red—something. I wish I had a joke there.

WOMAN:

If I was ever skeeved in any way I was allowed to leave. Not that I didn't walk out a few times. Oh my, there were a couple of times when I opened the door and just wanted to run.

MALE:

(to himself)

What *would* be the symbol of that organization? The Red Lips? The Red Labia?

WOMAN:

Pretty much did too. I'd mutter "Wrong address. Sorry," and I was like gone on my way.

MALE:

The Red Labia is funny, I wish I had said that.

WOMEN:

Like he didn't know who I was. Who else would I've been wearing a bright orange taffeta dress and knee high tie-up boots. Ha!—Just the cleaning ladies outfit! One time I remember scootin' back down the hall 'fore the door was full open. I wasn't waiting for the whole view.

(a frisson shakes her)

He wasn't ugly so much as he was real strange looking. He had these droopy patches under his eyes like something outta horror film. Like black skid marks my brother's Charger would leave on the Quickchek pavement. And his hair was matted down on either side of his head like it was licked down with fatback. But somehow he was pretty. Womanly.

MALE:

And that freaked you out?

WOMAN:

I hauled *ass* down them stairs. Out the lobby, right out the hotel, lawd I was moving lickety-split. I don't know, it was something I thought right then. He wasn't a man and he wasn't quite a woman either. You know? He was something in between, in a real wrong kinda way.

MALE:

Was he hermaphroditic?

WOMAN:

I don't think so. What's that mean?

MALE:

It's a person who has both sex organs. A penis and a vagina.

WOMAN:

Eew, how? What do you mean both? That's disgusting.

MALE:

I mean both. They were born that way, a genetic mishap. Ask *ya Lawd*, it's his handy work.

WOMAN:

Well I don't know what he was, if he was a hermaphra whatever or what. There was just something wrong and I was spooked.

MALE:

And you say nothing bad ever happened to you doing this.

WOMAN:

No well, I mean you know, in the serious way.

MALE:

Physically you mean. Thank god, with your chosen field. There are work place risks but that shouldn't be one. We all make our living with our bodies, but some bodies get more work from their living....Nothing like that's ever happened to you, nothing in a *serious* way?

WOMAN:

(pause, lost)

I gotta get going to my family. Mama's almost as bad as you when I'm late. She'll bring the wrath of Jesus if we miss the dinner special. Did you see my other sock? You get so excited I can never tell where you've thrown things. I think one time I found my bra wedged inside the radiator. I can understand nearby or on top, but actually *inside*? How'd you do that?

MALE:

Babe?

WOMAN:

That must take some passion to do all that. I'm glad I'm still able to get you all worked up. I'm glad after four months you haven't lost, well, you know, intrest yet. Most do. Most don't even make it half that.—Four months and I'm an old Daisy Day hat left out on the fairground. That's the worry. I don't think I could stomach that. Not just the work, not just not knowing what to do, esthetician....But intrest—no intrest....I don't think I could.

(she stops more than finishes. He stares at her. Long pause)

MALE:

What happened?

WOMAN:

You know what, I don't really want to have this talk.

MALE:

Why not?

WOMAN:

Cause I just really *don't*. Nothing good ever comes. Either you look at me funny or you look at me as something dirty. Sometimes it's worse. You don't look at me at all—you just stare down at something else real sad like....And what fun would that be?

MALE:

Baby, you're a high-priced escort.

WOMAN:

Not always. Not always, I won't always be.

MALE:

(pause)

Were you hurt, did you get hurt?—Was it a crime?

(no response)

Did it happen here, was it down in Atlanta? Was it one of your clients, one of your gentlemen, your lonely old men?

WOMAN:

Nooo. Most of them couldn't a'atched me if they tried.

MALE:

Someone you knew, someone from childhood, your neighborhood?

WOMAN:

Which time?

(she moves about distractedly)

Where's my fucking sock?—Great, now I'm cussing. Look what you've gone and made me done. Now I'm gonna have to give a dollar to the homeless man on 86th Street now.

MALE:

(stunned, watching her move about)

Would you—I...Would you tell me?

WOMAN:

So you can write it in one of your stories. Memorize me forever.

MALE:

Memorialize....No, I just—

WOMAN:

Look, I've really gotta go. Yer gonna need to go too. I can't leave you here. You'll probably snoop yerself around in my drawers. I don't want that. That's the last thing now—

(he stops her gently, touching her arm, stopping her in place)

MALE:

Please?....Would you please?

(she doesn't respond)

It happened twice? How—I don't....

WOMAN:

Oh it's a lot more common than you think.

(he lets go and she moves away)

MALE:

You knew them, they were your regulars?

WOMAN:

I told you I never had trouble with a client! All the gentlemen knew our company had some big black boys in case there was trouble. Just them knowing that made sure there was none.

MALE:

(pause)

I don't understand. It was in your hometown?

WOMAN:

Not all badness happens in big towns darling. Some of the ugly most we know how to do even better. It's our history and we're proud, good and bad. Lord have mercy on us for that too. We've got plenty of sin to hold with our bibles....It was a small town. We were small town girls. Friday night was a case of Genuine Draft, Saturday night was two cases.

MALE:

Don't joke.

WOMAN:

Is that you who just said that? *Well shut my mouth, I doan belev I lived to see the day.*

(he just looks at her sadly)

And it just happened. Two guys, a double date. Somebody's house, somebody's parents gone for a weekend up in High County. A real hot time that. A real treat for kit 'n kin when you go, I tell you....We drank too much. Or at least he did.

MALE:

Did you do anything about it?

WOMAN:

What do you mean?

MALE:

Did you do anything, did you tell anyone?

WOMAN:

My Mama. I told her later after the cops came.

MALE:

You told the cops, you called the cops?

WOMAN:

The other girl did.

MALE:

What do you mean? The same thing happened to her? It happened to both of you?....
Motherfucker, it was premeditated. They planned it!....What happened?

WOMAN:

We were in different bedrooms—

MALE

I don't *mean* about that. With the cops, what did they do?

WOMAN:

Don't you want to know? Don't you want all the gory details, to describe, to write down later
for your work? So you can pass it off as yours, as yer own creation? Ain't that the plan?

(no response)

Look at that, Yankee calm. I wouldn't've figured, what now with you facing it, what yer
wanting from me all along. Can't you taste it, don't you see it open full before your eyes?

MALE:

Can you just tell me?

WOMAN:

(pause)

I didn't want any trouble.

MALE:

What do you mean? What did you tell the cops?

WOMAN:

I didn't.

MALE:

(*pause*)

I don't, I don't understand. You called the cops.

WOMAN:

She did, the other girl.

MALE:

She called the cops?—She called the cops and the cops came to you and what? You didn't say anything? You didn't....

WOMAN:

You don't understand. We small towns have our own way of dealing with things.

MALE:

What're you talking about, "your *own* way"? This isn't the 1950s, this isn't still that world. Jim Crow and Governor Wallace and backroom coat hangers.

WOMAN:

Isn't it? Don't you think so?—Fat lot you know with all you know.

MALE:

The cops were there, they were at your house. Asking you what happened? Asking you to corroborate the other girl's story.—And you didn't *say* anything?

WOMAN:

It's complicated.

MALE:

What's complicated? The guy did it, he goes to jail and he never does that again. To anyone. Jesus Christ!

WOMAN

I don't want to discuss it.

MALE

What was the next time?

WOMAN:

Please stop.

MALE:

Another *Southern* gentlemen? More purveyors of virtue and grace?

WOMAN

I'm gonna be late. I need to get out of here.

MALE

Antebellum aristocracy? Or just a stupid fucking shit-kicking cracker out for a good time.

WOMAN:

You need to go. I need to lock the door when I leave.

MALE:

Tell me!

WOMAN:

It was different!....Why do you want it? Why? Cause it's mine?....It's mine, it's mine alone, all mine....Bad is ours alone much more than good could ever be. Don't you get that?

MALE:

(pause)

I'm sure it was different. But how?

WOMAN:

He was my boyfriend!

MALE:

(pause)

Your boyfriend, what boyfriend?....*Billy?*....It was Billy, my Billy?

WOMAN:

I don't want—

MALE:

(fierce)

You tell me.

(they stare a long time)

WOMAN:

We'd been fighting, kinda broken up.—And he was drunk, and *high*. He had a coke problem.

MALE:

Rich fucking waspy prick.

WOMAN:

He kicked in my apartment door when I wasn't home and was waiting for me when I came home from work.

MALE:

You were in Atlanta now, you were escorting?

WOMAN:

And we argued and fought.

MALE:

Physically.

WOMAN:

Not at first!

MALE:

But eventually, eventually physically....Fucking motherfucker. *Fucking scumbag!*

WOMAN:

It wasn't you.

MALE:

(he paces maniacally)

He's slumming so he feels all bets are off. All inhibitions, all conventions and customs. What about how *he* was using you?! What about his indulging his whole Madonna-Whore fetish. *You think he loved you?! You think it was love for him?! Wasn't he gratifying some perverse aberrance by dating you? No?!*

WOMEN:

It didn't *happen* to you.

MALE:

He was gonna take you off the dirt path, is that it? He was *gonna* marry you, put you in some white paneled Georgian with Ionic columns, with a lawn jockey?! Yes?! Was that the plan?! Goddamnit! God fucking damnit!

WOMAN:

It did happen to you!

(he turns to her, stares, realizes. After a moment, he moves to her slowly, stands above her looking down, as she looks up. He slinks to his knees and hugs her about her waist. She is emotionless, inert. Long moment)

WOMAN:

I'm okay. I'm all right.

MALE

I'm sorry.—Forgive me, babe I'm so sorry.

(he hugs her hard, almost against her wishes)

WOMEN:

No really, I'm okay, I am.

MALE:

I am so sorry.

WOMAN:

It's nothing, really.

MALE:

It's not nothing. It couldn't possibly be.....I'm trying, I'm just trying to—

WOMAN:

No really it is. It's just something that happened. I don't think about it.

(she gets up and he stares at her utterly bemused)

I know but you don't need to. I really am okay with it.

MALE:

You can't be. This—it's got to affect you. It's happened twice. Two men, two *different* men, did this horrible, unpardonable....

WOMAN:

I don't really think about it.

MALE:

(pause)

How do you not think about it? Doesn't that drive you mad? Doesn't it drive you crazy?

(she moves without responding)

Don't you see how it affects you, who you are? Are you kidding me? Baby you're kidding me right?

WOMAN:

What do you mean?

MALE:

Christ don't you see how you are? Don't you see what we just did, what we *always* do?.... You don't have to've trained in some Austrian sanatorium to diagnose it. I always figured it was something twisted and febrile. Your father, a randy uncle. 'Cause shit, something creates that.

WOMAN:

Creates what?

MALE:

That! That sex! All our sex!

WOMAN:

What about it?

MALE:

What you're like, what you ask me to do to you! Jesus Christ, don't you realize it!

WOMAN:

I like it. I realize I like it. You like it too!

MALE:

I've fucked you with a cucumber! I've, I've fucked you with a beer bottle! You *asked* me to!—Here! Here in this apartment you've over decorated, festooned like a newborn Brahmin to hide what you really do here. Here on the tony Upper Westside where you've chosen to build your Fortress of *Avoidance*. Among the elegant glitteratti strolling the streets with their black nannies pushing their white babies in carriages *nearby*, but behind. Enough behind. I've slapped you hard! I've bitten you! *You ask me to bite you!* You ask me, you beg me for it!

WOMAN:

It's fun, I like it!

MALE:

But why?! Christ why?!

WOMAN:

I don't ask why, it don't matter!

MALE:

Of course you don't, you never fucking do!

WOMAN:

I don't get too much in my head, so what? What good is it? What does it do for you? No sleeping, no friends, no peace. You can't stand the whole world, isn't that from asking why? Is that what I would get from asking? It's never done me much, that I learned long ago. Nice ass, great boobs, I go on just fine. No use to complicating something that ain't.

MALE

Of course you don't ask, you don't see that there's something wrong with it really.

WOMAN:

You don't seem to mind. You seem to like it *fine*. You seem to not be able to get enough!

MALE:

Of course not! A woman who likes the shit beat out of her, you're every man's dream! A way of getting even with every bitch who broke us!...But baby please, you've got to see.

WOMAN:

What, I don't see. It's just sex.

MALE:

It's not just sex! It's never just sex!

(she gets up to dress further, pause)

Did you do anything to Billy?

WOMAN:

I've got my family to meet.

MALE:

Did you call the cops? Did you ever...Tell me please, it's okay. I won't—did you call the police? Baby did you call the police?

(she stops her movement, stares at him defiantly)

WOMAN

No I didn't.

(he registers this painfully. she moves on. long pause)

MALE

Smart people, as far as I can tell who smart people are, get that way, they earn that designation, by having the ability *not* to make the same mistake over and over again.—They make mistakes, everyone makes mistakes again and again....But somehow, to not keep making the *same* mistake....Next time, will you promise me?

WOMAN:

What is that?

MALE:

(pause, calmly)

I need you to promise me that the next time, I mean god forbid it does—but if there *is* a next time, promise me you'll do something. You'll tell someone. You'll go and tell and follow through and this fucker, whoever he is, you'll get him, you'll string him up by his soft orbs. Promise me that, promise me please, you'll follow all the way though until he's arrested, until he's jailed and he goes away and rots and we castrate the fucker if we can.

WOMAN:

I don't know, it depends.

MALE:

(pause, incredulous)

What would it depend on?

WOMAN:

I don't know, it just would.

MALE:

(pause)

If some fucker did that again. *Again. A third time.* Can you say that? Can you *be* that way?

WOMAN:

I don't want any trouble.

MALE:

You've already *had* some trouble! You've already had a lot of fucking trouble!

WOMAN:

Please stop.

MALE:

How can you stand there and not say "Yes. *Yes!* Yes, next time I'll call the police. Yes next time I'll have his balls cut off."

WOMAN:

It won't change things.

MALE:

Yes it will change things, it'll fucking change *everything*. It'll change this one fucker! If nothing else, this next fucker, he'll be changed forever.

WOMAN:

There'll just be another after him.

MALE

How can you say that?! How can you feel that way?!

WOMAN

Because there's always another!

MALE:

Because of you! Because you don't fucking do anything!

WOMAN:

I can't stop them!

MALE:

You don't try! You don't even try!

WOMAN:

I couldn't if I tried!

MALE:

I don't mean physically! I'm not talking physically! I'm not blaming you! Of course you couldn't physically....But there are ways, you have ways....Promise me next time you will. This time, that time if it comes, please, please promise next time, the next time.

WOMAN:

I have to go.

MALE:

Promise you'll call the cops. Promise you'll prosecute and you'll testify and you'll charge—

WOMAN:

I can't. I won't do that.

MALE:

Promise me you'll change! Promise me you'll try!

WOMAN:

No I won't!

(her defiance catches him off guard. Struck dumb, he grabs her)

MALE:

Promise me.

WOMAN:

(fierce)

Let go of me.

MALE:

Promise me this!

WOMAN:

You're hurting me! Let go!

MALE:

Will you?! Will you?!

(he shakes her hard, manhandles her)

WOMAN:

Let me go! Don't. Don't!

MALE:

Will your promise me?!

WOMAN:

I WON'T! I WON'T!

(the lights go out)

MALE:

PROMISE ME! PROMISE ME THIS! PROMISE ME!

WOMAN:

I WON'T....NO!

END OF PLAY