ROMANTIC COMEDY

Bernard Slade
SETTING

The entire action of the play takes place in the study of Jason Carmichael's New York townhouse.

ACT ONE

Scene 1: A spring morning in the mid-sixties.
Scene 2: Late night, a year later.

ACT TWO

Scene 1: A November morning, ten years later.
Scene 2: Late afternoon, six weeks later.

ACT THREE

Scene 1: A mid-September morning, two years later.
Scene 2: Late afternoon, three weeks later.
Scene 3: The next morning.
Scene 1

TIME: A spring morning in 1965.

SETTING: The spacious study of Jason Carmichael's New York townhouse. The back wall contains a window that looks out onto the garden, there are double doors stage left that lead to the hall and a door stage right leads to a non-visible dressing room. The room is furnished with the usual number of sofas, chairs, coffee and end tables, and there is an antique desk upstage center that contains some neatly stacked scripts, papers, a telephone and a covered typewriter. Some of the walls are booklined and the study projects an aura of warm, tasteful, traditional elegance.

AT RISE: The phone is ringing in the unoccupied room. After a moment, Jason Carmichael enters from the dressing room. He is, as always, impeccably attired, at the moment in a dressing gown, ascot, slacks and velvet slippers. He is carrying a well tailored blue suit. At this point in time, in his mid-thirties, he is not conventionally handsome but, despite his crumpled face, possesses a mixture of arrogance, charm and sophistication that gives him a certain magnetism.

JASON
(Irritably muttering to himself)
I really wish someone would get that.
(Apparently someone does, as the phone stops ringing. Blanche Dailey opens the double doors and pokes her head into the room. Flamboyant in manner and dress, she admits to forty-two, looks fiftyish, is actually fifty-seven. Texas-born, thrice married, an ex-showgirl, but for many years a literary agent, she is nobody’s fool)

BLANCHE

(Surprised)
Why aren’t you dressed?

JASON
My club’s sending Boris—or someone over to give me a rubdown.

(She enters, closing doors behind her)

BLANCHE
Isn’t that a bit redundant on your wedding day? What are you doing holed up in here anyway?

JASON
Allison’s parents and some of her assorted relatives are staying in the upstairs rooms so I’ve been sleeping in the dressing room. How’s the house?

BLANCHE
Filling up. And, at the risk of introducing a somber note into this festive affair, costing you a bundle you can ill afford.

(Quietly)
God, you’re crass.

BLANCHE
(Unmoved)
I’m supposed to be. I’m your agent.

(Looking at suits)
You know your problem, Jason? You came out of your mother’s womb yelling “I’ll take one in every color.”

JASON
What do you want? You have an ulterior look about you.

BLANCHE
Well, for one thing, I wanted to audition the costume.

(Shooes a model’s twirl)
Very restrained for an old Follies girl, right?

JASON
Blanche, you have a choice. You can either be a Follies girl or you can be forty-two years old. You cannot be both.

BLANCHE
I hate people with mathematical minds.

(The phone rings and Blanche picks it up. Into phone)

JASON Carmichael’s residence—Yes, he is—Oh—Hold on a minute, please.

(She holds out the phone to him)

Long distance.

(He takes phone. She moves to pour herself a drink)

JASON
Yes?

(Into phone)

Yes?

(His tone changes)
Oh, hello—No, you’re not the last person I expected to hear from but I have had more thrilling beginnings to my day—Yes, I got your messages—Because, frankly, I didn’t see any point in talking to you.

(Becoming agitated)
Look, you were the one who walked out, not me!—It wasn’t what you did, it was the way you did it. If you’d been open with me instead of sneaking around behind—Oh, come on, you’d been meeting with him for over three months. Christ, we were together for eleven years and I had to find out by reading it in a column!

(He regains some control)
I agree. No point at all so I’m going to hang up now. I have a very busy schedule today—I’m going to have a massage and then get married—Well, maybe someday we’ll be able to sit down and laugh over it but I think you should know I don’t plan on ever becoming that mellow.

(Very upset, he hangs up and turns to look at Blanche)
BLANCHE
Marty?

JASON
Can you imagine the gall of that man? After all that's happened?

BLANCHE
Jason, he was your writing partner, not your wife. You sound like a jilted lover.

JASON
Why shouldn't I feel jilted? The man was meeting with some film producer behind my back working on a screenplay!

BLANCHE
I'm sure he wanted you to work on it with him but he knew you'd never move to L.A.

JASON
I'm too young to start writing about real life from memory.

BLANCHE
Since when did you write about real life?

JASON
(Pacing—very agitated)
My God, do you know what I went through with that man for eleven years? He always exuded a strange musty smell that positively made you reel. Did you ever notice that?

BLANCHE
You'll find someone else.

JASON
(A sudden change of mood; sadly)
No, I'll never find another partner like Marty. Why did he do it, Blanche?

BLANCHE
(Shrugs)
Oh, I don't know—I always got the feeling Marty felt overshadowed by you. Maybe he just wanted his own identity.

JASON
Who could confuse us? The man was five feet tall and had a small clump of hair growing out of the bridge of his nose.

(She watches him as he moves to pour himself a healthy drink)

BLANCHE
I sense a certain panic in you, Jason. What is it?

(He turns to look at her)

JASON
Marty and I spent all our writing lives together. Together we had five smash hits, two nervous hits and one flop. Lately, I've had this persistent, nasty little thought.

(He looks at her; simply)
Was he the talented one?

(Blanche is too astounded by his uncharacteristic vulnerability to reply)

Blanche, this is no time for a pause.

BLANCHE
I always get tongue-tied when I discover someone's human.

JASON
If you let it get outside this room I'll tell everyone that's the real color of your hair.

(They embrace. He moves away)

Where the hell is Boris? I have a knot in my shoulder that feels as if it was tied by a stevedore.

BLANCHE
You found anyone else you think you can work with?

JASON
Blanche, it's not like hiring a maid! A collaboration is a very sensitive relationship. It has all the disadvantages of a marriage and none of the advantages.
BLANCHE
What did you think of this play I sent you—The Girl In The Back Seat?

JASON
Oh, I don't know—I only half read it—I suppose it has a certain quaint charm, but I'm in no mood to make any decisions right now.

BLANCHE
Well, I think it has great possibilities and the author wanted you to read it. His name is P. J. Craddock.

JASON
What kind of name is that?

BLANCHE
Probably a real one. We've just corresponded so I don't know a damn thing about him except that he teaches school somewhere up in Vermont. Look, why don't you take the script along on your honeymoon? It'll help fill in the awkward pauses. The author's coming into town a week from today and I've set up a meeting with him here at eleven o'clock. Okay?

JASON
What makes you think we'll have awkward pauses?

BLANCHE
What? Oh, just a figure of speech.

JASON
I thought you liked Allison.

BLANCHE
I adore Allison.

JASON
Did I tell you her father was the Ambassador to New Zealand?

BLANCHE
Not in the last ten minutes. Why are you so impressed?

JASON
Blanche, the man has a flag on his car.

BLANCHE
Is that why you're getting married, Jason? So you can doublepark in downtown Auckland?

JASON
(After a slight pause)
Allison has some rare qualities, you know. She's unspoiled, sweet, giving, spontaneous. All the things I'm not.

BLANCHE
Honest, but hardly a reason for marriage.

JASON
All right. I'll be thirty-five next month. I want a family before I get too old.

(A slight shrug.
The timing's right.

BLANCHE
It's still not too late to call the whole thing off and send everyone home, you know.

JASON
Just like in The Philadelphia Story? People don't do that in real life.

(Blanche stands)

BLANCHE
Well—if there's not going to be any drama I may as well get drunk.

(She moves to the door)

JASON
Tell the maid to keep everyone out of here, will you? The only person I want to see is a masseur.

BLANCHE
Jason, are you sure you want to go through with this?

JASON
Of course I'm not. Is anybody just before their wedding?

(A beat)
But I'm sure of one thing. This marriage is going to work.
BLANCHE

How do you know?

JASON

I'm a perfectionist.

(She looks at him for a moment)

BLANCHE

(Gently)

Break a leg, kid.

(She exits.

Jason stands for a moment before he exits to the dressing room leaving the suit on the chair at stage left.

After a moment, the double doors open and Phoebe enters. She is holding an overstuffed, scuffed tote purse. We will later see that she is quite pretty but if Jason has made the best of his looks, she has made the worst. At this point in her mid-twenties she is inclined to cover her basic shyness with a somewhat self-conscious forthright manner. Right now she is totally overawed by her surroundings and stands drinking in the room. After a few moments she summons up enough courage to move back to the desk, tentatively touches the manuscripts. Finally, she slowly sits, not quite believing she is sitting at Jason Carmichael's desk. The phone rings. She stands and stares at it)

JASON (Offstage)

I'd really appreciate it if someone would get that.

(She gulps and picks up phone)

PHOEBE

(Into phone)

Hello—Yes, it is—Boris called in with the flu and can't come—Yes, I'll—I'll pass on that message.

(She hangs up. At this point Jason enters from the dressing room. He is totally nude. Oblivious to Phoebe, who is in a frozen state of shock, Jason carries a portable massage table which partially shields his body from the audience. He turns upstage, and moves towards the desk but stops in his tracks as he sees Phoebe. His back is now three-quarters to the audience, she is behind the desk, facing the audience; staring fixedly at Jason's hairline, trying to appear unruffled. There is a pause)

JASON

(Calmly)

Where's Boris?

PHOEBE

Oh, Boris couldn't come.

Oh.

(A pause)

PHOEBE

I'm—overawed.

(Another pause)

JASON

(Finally)

Thank you.

PHOEBE

You're younger looking than your photos.

(Too brightly)

Of course most of those were head shots. Ha, ha. What a dumb thing to say! I have this cousin who writes me letters and always puts "ha-ha" after anything she means to be funny. May I ask a question?

JASON

Of course.

PHOEBE

Are you naked?

JASON

Either that or I'm standing in a very severe draft.
PHOEBE
You're just a white blob to me. I'm not wearing my glasses. I have very weak eyes.

JASON
Well, I hope you have strong hands.

PHOEBE
Strong hands?

JASON
I have a knot in my shoulder. Do you think you can do anything about it?

PHOEBE
Well—I don't know. I can try—

(She speaks in an even stream of words)

—but first I'd like to say that I've seen all your plays and admired your work for many years. In fact, at the risk of sounding gushy, I might say I've idolized your talent. Over the years you and your partner have brightened one's days, molded one's tastes, and although impossible to attain, provided one with a standard of civilized behavior.

(There is a longish pause)

JASON
(Finally)
You're not the masseur.

PHOEBE
You thought I was?

JASON
I rarely receive guests in the buff.

PHOEBE
I'm very relieved to hear that. I mean I'm trying to appear unruffled and chic but underneath I'm a terrible prude.

JASON
Look, I don't want to appear churlish but I'm getting rather chilly. Who are you?

PHOEBE
Oh, I'm *The Girl In The Back Seat*.

(A beat)

P.J. Craddock. But my given name is Phoebe.

JASON
You're a week early.

PHOEBE
No, it's today.

(Happy to get out of his line of vision she moves around to extract a letter from her purse. He does not move)

I have the letter right here. It's a bit grubby from constant reading but—here.

(She hands it to him. He glances at it)

JASON
Uh—would you excuse me for a moment?

(In a flurry of activity, she quickly gathers up her purse)

PHOEBE
Gladly!

(She makes for the door, stops, awkwardly tries to lighten the situation)

It's funny, one's fantasies never turn out quite how one expects, do they? I mean, I'd always visualized you wearing a sports coat.

(She makes a rather awkward exit.

Jason puts the letter on the sofa, very calmly puts on his shorts, and shirt, and crosses to the mirror. He is looking into the mirror when his calm exterior shatters)

JASON
That—was—the—most—embarrassing experience of my life!!!

(He lets out an anguish yells and, overcome by the embarrassment of it all, proceeds to go into a jerky, strange, maniacal, hopping series of movements or dances around the room, all the time muttering)

God—that was embarrassing! Totally—embarrassing! Standing there naked like an idiot—embarrassing! Completely and utterly—

(He stops as he sees that Phoebe, clutching her purse has
opened the door and is staring at him; an odd expression on her face)

PHOEBE
I'm sorry. I thought I heard you yelling as if you were in pain.

JASON
(Extremely calm and polite again)
No, I'm all right, thank you.

PHOEBE
Oh, well, excuse me again.
(She exits.
JASON looks heavenward for a moment before letting out a low, heartfelt expletive)

PHOEBE
Oh—shit!!
(He pulls himself together, puts on trousers, and crosses to doors and opens them to admit Phoebe)

JASON
Look, perhaps I should come back at the Easter break.

PHOEBE
(Dryly)
Why? We're having so much fun.

JASON
Well, they seem to be preparing for some sort of function out there.

PHOEBE
I'm sorry, Miss Craddock, I'm afraid you've caught me at an awkward time.

JASON
Yes, there's a hippopotamus in the room isn't there? It's an expression. There's something present that neither of us wants to acknowledge. But we both know it's there, don't we?

PHOEBE
We do?

PHOEBE
I've been thinking about what you were doing when I came back in here just now.

JASON
Miss Craddock, I really don't think it's necessary to—

PHOEBE
No, I believe we should bring it out in the open. You were dancing around the room in a bizarre fashion and uttering odd, guttural sounds. Well, I want you to know that I don't think any the worse of you for that.

JASON
Thank you.

PHOEBE
Sometimes when I'm alone in the classroom I hook my feet over a rafter, hang upside down and sing "Night And Day." I mean we all do peculiar things when we're alone.

JASON
(Despite himself, he is touched by her kindness and starts to become intrigued by her)

PHOEBE
You're very kind.

JASON
(Phoebe becomes uncomfortable under his gaze)

PHOEBE
I feel like an idiot. There's perspiration trickling down my back, and the strap on my slip has broken.

JASON
There's no need for you to have told me that.

PHOEBE
Bad habit.

JASON
What?

PHOEBE
Telling people before they notice it themselves. You know, "I'm
Phoebe Craddock, I have squinty eyes and I'm messy looking but I hope you like me anyway."

JASON

You said you've seen all my plays?

PHOEBE

Twenty-eight times.

JASON

Each?

PHOEBE

In Boston—when you were trying out. I put myself through school working as an usher at the Colonial Theater.

JASON

Ushers usually don't watch plays. They sit in the lobby and talk too loudly.

PHOEBE

Not me. I saw everything but I always liked the romantic comedies best. I mean I realize they weren't representative of the real world as we know it—at least as I know it—there isn't an abundance of elegance or wit where I was raised—I mean you could go a lifetime in my neighborhood without anyone saying anything you'd want to put in a play. Shut up, Phoebe.

JASON

I beg your pardon?

PHOEBE

I suppose I feel if I keep talking I won't have to hear what you have to say about my play.

JASON

I'm sorry. I haven't had time to really read it yet.

(There is a slight pause)

PHOEBE

May I sit for a moment?

JASON

Of course.

PHOEBE

Thank you. I feel a little faint. From relief. Isn't that silly?

JASON

(Gently)

No, I understand perfectly. It's no fun being naked.

PHOEBE

It's quite curious. Did you know one's knees actually do knock when one is apprehensive?

(He is staring at her)

Is there lipstick on my teeth?

JASON

What? Oh, no. I have this strange feeling we've met before.

PHOEBE

We have. It was about five years ago. You were trying out Blue Is For Boys. Between the Wednesday matinee and evening performance I was in the Union Oyster House. You came in and sat at the only empty table, which happened to be right next to mine. Well, naturally I was thrilled and in a burst of girlish impetuosity I turned and blurted out a stream of totally incoherent compliments about how much I admired your work. You were very nice, listened politely and said "thank you." Still trembling from the encounter I turned away. I was drinking hot chocolate—you know with those small marshmallows floating on top? I had just taken a gulp when you suddenly said, "And what do you do?" The hot chocolate went down the wrong way, I choked slightly, and as I looked at you, I realized I had small marshmallows shooting out of my nose. You looked at me for a moment and then, very gravely, you said, "You know, not many people can do that."

JASON

It seems that our meetings are not destined to go smoothly.

PHOEBE

Not at all the way the characters in your plays would meet.
JASON
Only because I didn't think of it.
(They smile at one another)

PHOEBE
Do you need any help?

JASON
In my career?

PHOEBE
With your cuff links.

JASON
Thank you.

(She crosses to him, bends over to thread the cuff links. Jason, conscious of her closeness, is staring at her. She looks up)

PHOEBE
I'm sorry, I'm all thumbs.
(Shes notices his stare)

What is it?

JASON
You don't smell musty.

PHOEBE
(At a loss)

Uh—thank you.

JASON
My ex-partner smelled musty.

PHOEBE
(Puzzled)

He wasn't that old was he?

JASON
No.

(She goes back to putting the cuff links in)

PHOEBE
I'm afraid I've crumpled your cuff.

(Jason is looking at her with an odd, incredulous expression. Disturbed and somewhat bewildered by his reaction to her, he abruptly picks up her script, flips it open)

JASON
Why did you want me to read your play?

PHOEBE
I stole the leading character from you.

(He looks up from the script)

JASON
Which one?

PHOEBE
The girl you used to write in the fifties. The high-spirited but basically "nice" girl who always faced the dilemma of whether to forfeit her virginity or hold onto it until the final curtain. You remember her?

JASON
Of course. Patti—Sally—Mary.

PHOEBE
(A thought hits her)

Why did they all have such short names?

JASON
They're easy to type.

(He goes back to reading script)

PHOEBE
Ah. Well, whatever happened to her?

JASON
She always successfully defended her virginity, married the leading man, moved to Scarsdale, had 2.7 children and lived happily ever after.
PHOEBE
(Nervously—very aware of him reading her script)
Exactly. But what if she didn’t live happily ever after? Supposing twenty years later—today—she went through a divorce. Now in her late thirties, still attractive, she’s suddenly single again and is plunged into an entirely new world with a whole new sexual morality. How does she cope with that?

JASON
The Girl In The Back Seat.

PHOEBE
Well, that’s where most of us ended up fighting for our honor, isn’t it?

(He looks at her)

JASON
What do you know about fifties’ sexual mores? Aren’t you part of the permissive sixties?

PHOEBE
No, I’m extremely backward. I mean in that way.

(He breaks eye contact, moves to window, reading script)

Anyway, I borrowed your character, added twenty years and took it from there.

JASON
You don’t know how to construct a scene and your dialogue is stilted.

PHOEBE
You can tell all that from three pages?

JASON
(Testily)
Look, I do hope you’re not going to be—sensitive!

PHOEBE
Why do you say my dialogue is stilted?

JASON
The girl says “purchase” instead of “buy,” “obtain” instead of “get” and “plight” instead of “trouble.” People don’t talk like that.

PHOEBE
I do.

JASON
You’re an English teacher from a small village in Vermont and I have the suspicion you’re quite eccentric.

PHOEBE
Spotted that, did you?

JASON
You know that about yourself?

PHOEBE
No. I only said it because I didn’t want to appear sensitive.

JASON
(Impatiently)
Look, when I said you were eccentric I meant it as a compliment!

PHOEBE
Thank you. I think you’re eccentric too.

JASON
Why?

PHOEBE
You do peculiar things when you’re alone.

JASON
So do you.

PHOEBE
No, I don’t. I made that up to lessen your embarrassment.

JASON
Miss Craddock, you have a warped view of life.

PHOEBE
Another compliment?
JASON
Essential for someone who wants to write comedy. But it's only a start.
   (She moves to collect her things)
PHOEBE
Yes, well, I certainly appreciate your taking the time to see me.
   (She starts for the door)
JASON
Would you stop teaching and move to New York to work with me?
   (She turns)
PHOEBE
I thought you hated my play?
JASON
Why would you think that?
PHOEBE
You said I didn't know how to construct a scene and my dialogue was stilted.
JASON
My dialogue is brilliant.
PHOEBE
You really want to work with me?
JASON
I'm not sure yet. Look, you'd better sit down.
   (She does. His manner is still brusque)
Miss Craddock, what do you think the theatre is?
PHOEBE
A celebration of the human condition.
JASON
   (Impatiently)
No, that's not what I'm talking about. Are you single?

PHOEBE
Yes.
JASON
Do you plan on getting married?
PHOEBE
Eventually.
JASON
That's not good enough.
PHOEBE
I didn't know this was an exam.
JASON
Look, I don't plan on us becoming Will and Ariel Durant. But I don't want to invest in a partnership and then have you suddenly get the urge to become a nursing mother.
PHOEBE
I see.
JASON
No, you don't. You don't know a damn thing about the theatre. The working conditions are intolerable, the people you have to deal with are egocentric maniacs, and it's filled with rejections on every level. When you're writing comedy the opposite of success is not failure—it's embarrassment. And it's very public. They write headlines, Miss Craddock!
   (He is unhappy with his knot, tears it apart and starts again)
All right, that's the pleasant part. You'll be working with me and I am a difficult person. In fact, some people think I am impossible. I am demanding, selfish, obsessive, moody, arrogant, rarely satisfied and my own mother once said I lack warmth. Would you be willing to accept those conditions?
PHOEBE
Sounds like a lot of fun.
JASON
All right, dammit, we'll give it a try.
   (He angrily turns away again)
PHOEBE

I just have one question.

(He looks at her)

Why are you so angry?

(There is a pause)

JASON

(Finally—quietly)
Well, what do you expect? You barge in here unannounced, disrupt my life, and then have the gall to be talented.

(She doesn’t know what to say to this)
I’m sorry. It’s—your timing. I’d made certain—plans.

(She is still puzzled)
(Evasively)
Also this damned tie won’t tie.

PHOEBE

Maybe I can help.

(She moves to him, knots tie through following)
My mother died when I was young so I’ve been tying my father’s and three brothers’ ties for years. I can cook, darn socks, even cut hair if required.

JASON

(Conscious of her closeness)
A simple Windsor knot will do for now.

(She finishes knotting the tie, pats it in place)

PHOEBE

There.

(They are standing very close, both now aware of the current between them)

JASON

(With a tone of quiet disbelief)
You’re not my type at all you know.

(The moment is shattered as Allison St. James, in a bridal dress and veil, enters the room. She is a beautiful, friendly, young woman with an open, direct manner. She stops and surveys the two)

ALLISON

Fine state of affairs. Two minutes before our wedding I discover my fiancé with another woman.

JASON

(Flustered)
Allison, you shouldn’t be here.

ALLISON

Oh, I don’t believe in those old superstitions.

(She moves to him, kisses him)
I just had to find out if you’re as terrified as I am.

(She slips her arm through his, smiles at the stunned Phoebe)
I don’t believe we’ve met.

JASON

(Very flustered)
I’m sorry. Miss—

(Goes blank on her name)
—uh—I’d like you to meet—uh—

(He goes blank again)
My fiancée.

ALLISON

(Amused at his nervousness)
Allison. I didn’t catch your name.

PHOEBE

Craddock—P.J.—Phoebe.

JASON

Miss Craddock—is going to be my new writing partner.

ALLISON

When did this happen?

JASON

What happen? Oh, just today.
ALLISON
That's marvelous! We'll have the same anniversary.

(They stare at her)

Your partnership and our marriage. We'll be able to all celebrate together.

(To Phoebe)
You're staying for the wedding I hope.

JASON
Her?

ALLISON
Darling, I know you are.

(To Phoebe)
I'll throw you the bouquet.

PHOEBE
I'm sorry—I'm from Vermont.

(Allison is puzzled)

JASON
It was Blanche's fault. She came a week early. And she's a woman.

(Not understanding)

ALLISON
That's—too bad.

(To Jason—playfully)
Well, sir—what do you think? Still want to go through with this thing?

JASON
Yes—well, I've had trouble tying my tie.

(He moves away to put on his jacket)

ALLISON
Jason, did you know you're not making any sense at all?

JASON
I'm not?

ALLISON
That's okay. You've made me feel better.

JASON
Oh?

ALLISON
You're obviously as terrified as I am.

(She moves to door, turns)
I hope we'll be good friends, Phoebe.

(To Jason)
As for you—I'll see you around, huh?

(She blows him a kiss and exits)

PHOEBE
(Finally)
She's very beautiful.

Yes.

PHOEBE
She seems nice.

JASON
She is, actually.

Lively.

JASON
Very.

PHOEBE
She's obviously very fond of you. Well—naturally.

Hmm.

PHOEBE
Very flat, Norfolk.

(He looks at her)
JASON
What?

PHOEBE
We were sounding very Noel Cowardish. It's a line from one of his plays.

JASON
_Private Lives._

PHOEBE
First scene.

JASON
They met on their respective honeymoons, fell in love, and ran away together at the end of the first act.

(A beat)
Marvelous.

PHOEBE
And he made it totally believable.

JASON
Anything's believable if it's done well.

(They look at one another for a moment)
Would you like a drink?

PHOEBE
(Gratefully)
Yes, I really would.

(He moves to pour two drinks)

JASON
Scotch?

PHOEBE
It doesn't matter. I don't drink.

(He turns to look at her)
It seems—fitting.

(Finally)
It's been quite a day.

JASON
Oh?

PHOEBE
Well, I meet my girlhood idol, he asks me to work with him; and then rushes off to get married.

(A beat)
Extraordinary.

JASON
Oh, I don't know. Boy meets girl, boy gets girl, boy loses girl. Been done a million times.

(They are gazing at one another as Blanché enters through the double doors)

BLANCHÉ
Places please. Let's get this show on the road.

(She stops as she sees Phoebe)
Who's she?

JASON
Long story. I'll explain later.

BLANCHÉ
Well, it's now or never, kid.

JASON
I'll be right there.

(Blanche exits. Jason holds his glass up in a toast. Finally)
Phoebe—to us.

(They both drink. He puts his glass down, moves to the double doors, opens them. We hear a low murmur from outside. He looks out the door. Slowly he turns and looks at Phoebe. They are in this position as the CURTAIN FALLS)

END OF SCENE 1
Scene 2

TIME: A year later. Very late at night.

AT RISE: It is raining outside. The stage is dark except for a small pool of light which emanates from an end table lamp and illuminates Jason who is sitting on the sofa, a folded New York Times beside him. He is wearing an overcoat and scarf and is steadily drinking from a large tumbler of Scotch, his face impassive. He shows no sign of drunkenness. Blanche, dressed in a fur coat over evening wear, appears in the doorway, regards him for a moment.

BLANCHE

Is getting drunk the answer?

JASON

No, but it makes you forget the question.

(She touches a light switch and some other lamps go on)

BLANCHE

The audience really loved it, Jason.

(A statement)

JASON

You saw the Times notice.

(She gives a little shrug, removes her fur coat, moves to deposit it)
BLANCHE
Listen, it'll do very well in stock. Why'd you leave the party so early?

JASON
My cheeks started to ache from smiling as if I didn't care. Felt like "Miss Rhode Island." How's Phoebe taking it?

BLANCHE
I don't know. She left right after that horrible thing she did.

JASON
What horrible thing?

(Blanche shudders slightly)

BLANCHE
It's too horrible to talk about. Be nice to her, Jason. She's probably feeling very fragile.

JASON
I don't exactly feel like a Mack truck myself.

(Phoebe enters. She is soaking wet and is wearing a minicoat, buttoned incorrectly, over an evening dress that has seen better days. She pauses inside the door, attempts a bright smile)

PHOEBE
Well, the theatre certainly is character building, isn't it?

(Jason has been looking at her appearance)

JASON
Jesus, who dresses you—Quasimodo? You okay?

PHOEBE
Well, I do have some questions.

JASON
The only answer for that is a drink.

PHOEBE
No, thank you. I believe I'm still quite "squiffed." Tonight I found out that I cannot drink.

JASON
Oh?

(Phoebe nods thoughtfully)

PHOEBE
I threw up on the mayor's shoes. Well, in the mayor's shoes. Shoe. (She gives up on the wet buttons)

His right shoe.

(Jason moves to her, unbuttons her coat, attempts to get her out of it as one would undress a child)

JASON
How did you manage that?

PHOEBE
He was sitting next to me at the party. He'd taken off his right shoe. I'd had two banana daiquiris. I must say he was very nice about it.

JASON
Well, he's always been a big supporter of the Arts. (To Blanche)

Was that the horrible thing she did?

BLANCHE
No, that was later.

PHOEBE
Would you mind if I didn't talk about that for a few years?

(Jason moves to help her out of her minicoat. He hands her purse and rain hat to Blanche)

JASON
Pull your arm out of this—no, the other arm—look, just stand still and don't do anything—that's it. (He gets the coat off, hands it to Blanche, who takes it to the library steps)

Go and sit over there. (He indicates the sofa. Phoebe crosses to sit while Jason gets a lap robe from the ottoman in front of the wing chair. He crosses with it to Phoebe. Nervously—)}
You're not going to throw up again, are you?
(He puts the blanket around Phoebe's shoulders. He kneels to take off her wet shoes)

PHOEBE
No, I was just wondering why I feel like a criminal. I mean we didn't commit an actual crime, did we?

JASON
Just a misdemeanor.

PHOEBE
Then why do I feel like Lizzie Borden? Is that normal?

JASON
Oh, I think it's fairly natural. After all, the murder weapon's in full view at the Booth Theatre. Blanche, I think this girl could use some coffee. Would you tell the cook to make some?

(Blanche has been watching him curiously)

What's the matter?

BLANCHE
She's very good for you, Jason. Brings out your better nature.
(She exits)

JASON
Don't take it too hard, kid—it's only a play. In fifty years' time only you and I will remember. And I'm not too sure about "I."
(He crosses to the bar to make a drink)

PHOEBE
It's not only the play. It's what I did at the party in front of all those people.

JASON
Well, since it seems to be in the public domain, maybe you should tell me about it.

PHOEBE
(In dull voice)
There was a great deal of noise and confusion. Then someone rushed in the door with a newspaper in his hand. He shoved it at me and said, "It's marvelous—it's all about you!" I scrambled up on top of a table and yelled, "Quiet everyone—I have a wonderful review from the Times!"

(A beat)

Now you may be wondering why I did that.

JASON
It does seem somewhat uncharacteristic.

PHOEBE
My only excuse is that I was—overstimulated. Of course everyone immediately became silent and I began to read the review in my best, loud, clear, schoolteacher voice. Well, it was an absolutely horrendous notice. All the people were staring up at me as if I was—

(Shesearches for the right word)
—demented. It was—horrible. I tried skipping paragraphs—editing out the bad parts, but it was difficult because—I'm somewhat astigmatic—and there were no good parts. Gradually this confused—babble—filled the room and—I'm having trouble concentrating—I'd like to stop talking now.

JASON
Who was the son of a bitch who gave you the paper?

PHOEBE
My father. Oh, it wasn't his fault. He thought it was exciting just to be mentioned.
(Shes looking at him)

Was it as humiliating as I think it was?

JASON
You feeling better now?

PHOEBE
Sleepy. Incredibly sleepy. Do you think that's the alcohol?

JASON
Either that or the bananas.
(He sits beside her on the sofa)

Why don't you put your head down?
(Much to his surprise, she doesn't lean the other way but gratefully puts her head on his lap and closes her eyes)

You'll be okay, kid. Oh, for a few days you'll be a little gun shy. You'll be afraid to open menus in restaurants in case there's a bad review there—but eventually the pain will go away and be replaced by something much easier to live with—bitterness.

PHOEBE

(Sleepily)
You're trying to make me laugh.

JASON

Not too successfully, it seems.

PHOEBE

But I appreciate—the thought.
(She seems to have drifted off to sleep.
He gently strokes her hair)

JASON

Sweet dreams, kid.

(At this point Allison enters. Still beautiful, tastefully dressed, she seems somewhat more cheerful than the occasion demands and we sense an underlying tension between her and Jason. She stops as she sees Jason and Phoebe)

ALLISON

(Finally)
Do you ever get the feeling we're drifting apart?

(Jason turns to look at her but continues to absently stroke Phoebe's hair)

JASON

Just comforting a comrade wounded in the field of battle.

ALLISON

That's weird. I mean usually she's so shy around you.
(She takes off her coat and deposits it)

JASON

I think it's the liquor talking.

(Allison sits down on the other end of the sofa, takes Phoebe's feet in her lap)

ALLISON

Her feet are freezing, poor dear.
(She warms her feet with her hands during the following)
I'm sorry about the play.

JASON

You mean the notices?

ALLISON

Are they that important?

JASON

Only if you want people to buy tickets.

ALLISON

Don't patronize me, Jason. I may not know anything about the theatre but I'm not an idiot.

JASON

It's all right, Allison. I know you never liked the play.

ALLISON

It's not that I didn't like it. It's just that I didn't think it was about anything.

JASON

(Wearily)
It was about giving an audience an entertaining evening.
(Allison looks down at Phoebe)

ALLISON

Was it that hard on her?

JASON

Allison, we just saw a year's work go down the drain. She's given up a career, spent all her savings and tonight it all blew up in her face.
(A beat)
And how was your day?

ALLISON

What are you going to do?
JASON
Have an affair or buy a new hat. I'll think of something.
(She regards him for a moment)

ALLISON
Jason, we need to talk.

JASON
I thought we were.

ALLISON
I mean about us.

JASON
(Finally)
Does it have to be tonight?

ALLISON
Yes. I have something important to tell you. I've been waiting until after you got the play open.
(She gets up, moves away)
It didn't seem fair to burden you with it before.

JASON
Suddenly I'm cold sober.

ALLISON
Well, I think we should be alone for this sort of discussion.

JASON
Then why did you bring it up now?

ALLISON
(A trifl.e tartly)
I just wanted you to pencil it in on your appointment pad.
(They are looking at one another as Blanche, carrying a tray containing coffee, enters)

BLANCHE
Sorry I was so long. I was on the phone to Harry, trying to get some word on the other reviews.

JASON
And?

BLANCHE
I guess they weren't in the mood for charm, Jason.
(There is a gloomy pause)

ALLISON
(Finally)
So—is it okay if I get out of my "lucky" dress now?
(Blanche and Jason both turn to look at her)
Sorry, I was just trying to lighten the situation.

BLANCHE
You want some coffee?

ALLISON
No thanks, Blanche. I really do need to get out of these clothes.
(Sh e moves to door, turns)
I think Phoebe might feel better if she stayed with us tonight. I'll bring her some blankets and she can bunk down in your dressing room.
(Allison exits. Blanche pours coffee through following)

BLANCHE
She's sweet.

JASON
She's a snob.

BLANCHE
(Surprised)
Allison's the least snobbish person I know.

JASON
I mean about the theatre.

BLANCHE
Well, you're a snob about everything but the theatre.
(At this point Phoebe sits bolt upright)
PHOEBE
Oh, my God!
(She stands up, looking very disoriented. Jason and Blanche have also jumped up)

BLANCHE
What is it?

PHOEBE
I—I had this terrible dream. I was at this opening night party and someone shoved a newspaper in my hand and—
(As the realization hits her)
Oh, my God.

JASON
I think she's still "squiffed."
(Blanche hands Phoebe a cup of coffee)

BLANCHE
Here, drink this.

JASON
I'd better change. My lap feels a little warm and damp.

PHOEBE
(Embarrassed)
I'm terribly sorry.

JASON
That's all right. It felt quite agreeable.
(He exits to the dressing room)

PHOEBE
Did I pass out?

BLANCHE
No, you just went to sleep in Jason's lap.

PHOEBE
(Stunned)
I actually went to sleep in his lap?
(Blanche nods)

BLANCHE
What did he do?

PHOEBE
He stroked your hair.

BLANCHE
How—odd. I mean, Jason is not a physical person. We rarely touch.

PHOEBE
Well, you touched tonight.

BLANCHE
And I missed it.
(Blanche sips coffee for a moment)
Do you know I never call him anything?

PHOEBE
(Puzzled)
What?

BLANCHE
Well, it seemed silly to call him Mr. Carmichael and although he asked me to call him Jason, I could never quite bring myself to do that.

PHOEBE
That must have made things a bit difficult when you were working together.

BLANCHE
Yes. I always had to wait until he looked at me before I could talk. Will they close the play tomorrow?

PHOEBE
Nothing lasts forever, kid. What are you going to do?

BLANCHE
Go back to the classroom, I suppose.
(A small shrug)
It's probably all for the best.

PHOEBE
I know what you mean.
PHOEBE

(Flushed)
Is the way I feel about him that obvious?

BLANCHE

(Gently)
Only to the trained eye. Get a good night’s sleep, honey. We’ll talk tomorrow.

(Blanche crosses to get her coat)
Oh, Jason... Jason, I’m leaving. I’ll see you in the morning at the funeral arrangements.

(She exits. Jason, wearing a dressing gown over his dinner shirt and trousers, enters. He crosses to close the door behind Blanche)

JASON

Look, would it be all right with you if I dropped the arrogant facade, got sloppy drunk and whined and sniveled a lot?

PHOEBE

I’d consider that a privilege.

(They look at one another for a moment)

JASON

Do me a favor, Phoebe—don’t.

PHOEBE

Don’t what?

JASON

Don’t make a speech.

PHOEBE

How did you know I was going to make a speech?

(He moves to pour himself a drink)

JASON

Your eyes start to water and you get an odd, pinched look around the bridge of your nose.

(He turns to face her)
Anyway, it’s my turn.

PHOEBE

(Surprised)
Your turn?

JASON

Yes.

(He paces for a moment, turns to face her)
Phoebe—don’t let them get to you.

(She waits but there is no more)

PHOEBE

(Incredulous)
That’s it? “Don’t let them get to me?”

JASON

That’s about it. I know this whole experience must have been difficult for you but—

PHOEBE

(Emotionally)
Difficult? The first week of rehearsal I was bitten by a rat! The second week I was mugged in the elevator—and then in Philadelphia I became quite unhinged and almost tackled a middle-aged woman around the knees to prevent her from leaving the theatre. After forcing her into a seat and hissing, “You’ll miss the best part!” I discovered she was one of the ushers. This whole experience was capped tonight when I regurgitated into the shoe of a public official, stood up on a table to happily announce my inadequacies to a crowd of total strangers, fell asleep in your lap and dribbled on your overcoat, and—

(Her eyes welling up)
—it was the best time I’ve had in my entire life!

JASON

Then why are you crying?

PHOEBE

(Tearfully)
Because it’s all over!
. (Very touched, Jason sits next to her and puts his arm around her so that her head rests on his shoulder.

Finally)
I'm wetting you again.

JASON
(Brusquely; moving away)
Yes, and it's something that should be nipped firmly in the bud. Now, if you promise to stop, I'll promise to be better next time.

PHOEBE
(Stunned)
Next time?

JASON
On the next play.

PHOEBE
You mean you want to go on working with me?

JASON
You think I'm going to take the rap alone?

PHOEBE
But—but I don't understand. Everyone said this play didn't have the quality of your others because of me.

JASON
They were right.

(She stares at him)
You let me take your play, remove all the charm and sentiment and substitute jokes. If we're going to keep working together, you've got to stop letting me bully you. You're my partner, not my student, so at least once a month I suggest you tell me I'm a horse's ass. Look, if you're even thinking of making a speech, I'll withdraw the offer.

PHOEBE
It's not a speech. I just don't want you to do this out of loyalty—or misplaced compassion. I realize my behavior tonight has been rather energetic, but, actually, I'm quite resilient. I'll survive.

JASON
Well, I'm not sure I will.

(As she looks at him: Awkwardly)
The reason I'm asking you to stay is not only professional. I've—I've grown—attached to you.

(Her gaze disconcerts him, causing him to blurt)
Phoebe, Allison and I are separating.

PHOEBE
(Absolutely stunned)
When did this happen?

JASON
It's still only a rumor, but, as you know, bad rumors generally turn out to be true.

(Embarrassed)
Look, I feel uncomfortable talking about this. The point is I'm going to need a friend.

PHOEBE
(Sympathetically)
Is there anything I can do?

JASON
(Gently)
Yes—go wash your face. When you come back we'll both get really drunk and convince each other that none of this is our fault.

(Shes moves to the dressing room door, turns, has difficulty saying his name but finally manages it)

PHOEBE
Jason?

JASON
Oh, God, you're really going to do it, aren't you?

PHOEBE
(Rather formally)
Jason, I know how any display of emotion embarrasses you, but that's all the more reason why this must be said. I—I needed someone tonight and I want to thank you for letting me be your friend.
(She quickly exits to the dressing room.
Allison, wearing a dressing gown, and carrying some blankets, enters)

ALLISON
Well, has my pal sobered up yet?

JASON
I wasn’t drunk—just shell shocked.

ALLISON
I meant Phoebe.
(She puts blanket down, starts to leave but at the door turns and stops)
I’ve thought of a hundred ways to tell you this but—well, I suppose
the best way is to keep it simple.

(Jason)
Always.

ALLISON
The trouble is, it’s not that simple.
(She sits)
You know, when I married you I really didn’t know what I was getting into. Because of the—well, the sort of plays you write I suppose
I assumed you just spend a couple of hours every morning dashing
them off. It takes a lot longer than that, doesn’t it?

JASON
(A trifle bitterly)
Yes, it takes a lot of thought to appear glib.

ALLISON
Please, Jason. Anyway, I decided I needed to find something to fill
my time. Then a few weeks ago the solution presented itself. Jason,
I’m pregnant.

(Jason)
Pregnant?

ALLISON
Two months. I put off telling you because I knew you were preoccu-
pied and—
(She gives a small shrug)
—I thought if the play was a success we could have a double cele-
bration. Now—well, would you accept it as a consolation prize?
(He is still staring at her.
She gives a little laugh)
Hey, I expected surprise but not catatonia.

JASON
I’m sorry. I’m very happy.

ALLISON
You look as if you’ve just lost your best friend.
(This innocent remark is not lost on him)

JASON
It’s fatigue.

ALLISON
Maybe I shouldn’t have hit you with it tonight.

JASON
No, it’s—it’s nice to know something I collaborated on turned out
right.
(He moves to her)
Really, I’m very pleased.
(They embrace for a moment. She looks at him)

ALLISON
Are we going to be all right, Jason?

JASON
(Finally)
Sure—we’ll run for years.

ALLISON
You looked exhausted. Come to bed.

JASON
I’ll—I’ll be right up.
(Allison exits.
Phoebe, her face scrubbed clean, enters)

PHOEBE
Did you know you're the only person I know who has mono-
grammed soap?

JASON
(Distracted)
What? Oh, when I'm not wearing clothes I'm not sure who I am.
(She notices his expression)

PHOEBE
Are you all right?

JASON
I'm fine.

(Briskly)
Look, tomorrow's going to be rather hectic so let's plan on a work
session at ten a.m. on Friday, okay?

(Very confused, she manages a nod)

Good night, Phoebe.
(He exits.

Totally bewildered, Phoebe tries to fathom what has just
taken place. She does this by miming what happened before
she left the room and then what happened after she came
back. It doesn't help and she stands in the middle of the
room, completely baffled.

Jason reappears in the doorway)

JASON
Oh, I think you should know that Allison—well, she got pregnant.

PHOEBE
While I was out of the room? I'm sorry, I'm still a little—scattered.
(Jason turns to exit, turns back)

JASON
(Awkwardly)

Uh—if I were you—I'd pray for a girl.

PHOEBE
Why?

JASON
I'd like to name her after you.

PHOEBE
Me?

JASON
Didn't I ever tell you? I've always liked the name Phoebe.

(They look at one another for a brief moment before he exits
quickly.

Phoebe slowly moves to the coffee table, picks up the brandy
snifter and tosses all the brandy down as the CURTAIN
FALLS)

END OF ACT ONE
ACT TWO
Scene 1


AT RISE: Jason, now in his mid-forties, looking elegant in casual, expensive “work clothes,” is sitting on the sofa reading some loose typewritten pages.

Phoebe, now in her mid-thirties, wearing a shapeless, worn jogging suit and an old baseball cap, is sitting with a sewing basket beside her, patching the knees of a child’s jeans.

Jason looks up from the pages, looks off into space, frowning.

PHOEBE

Well?

(Vaguely)

JASON

It's fine.

PHOEBE

Jason, I worked six hours rewriting that scene!

(He tosses the pages aside onto the coffee table)

JASON

I said it was fine.
PHOEBE
You always say that when you mean “okay,” “not good enough,” “less than wonderful.”

(He starts to pace)

JASON
(Frustrated)
It's not the scene. The scene's fine. It's the whole damned second act.

PHOEBE
So we'll change it.

JASON
I don't know, it seems like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

(He looks at her; irritably)
Why do you wear that hat?

PHOEBE
It keeps my hair in place when I'm jogging.

JASON
It makes you look like—

PHOEBE
Katharine Hepburn.

JASON
Yogi Berra.

PHOEBE
Yes, everyone says that. What we need is—

JASON
A good rationale for him remaining faithful to his wife.

PHOEBE
All right. He loves her.

JASON
I mean something the audience will buy.

(He sighs, shakes his head)

It used to be so much easier. You had a boy and girl and then you took three acts to dream them into bed together.

PHOEBE
I still like that story.

JASON
I mean, we must be insane! Half the world out there is doing obscene things to the other half and we're writing a play about a man who's thinking of cheating on his wife.

PHOEBE
People still respond to Romantic Comedies, Jason. You just have to write them differently.

(Suddenly)
JASON
Tell me something. Why did they take the running boards off cars?

PHOEBE
I give up.

JASON
Why did they take the elegance out of everything? Everything used to be better. Food, trains, cars, newspapers, music, hotels, movies, clothes. Everything.

(A beat)
May be it's me. Maybe I was better.

PHOEBE
Are you depressed just because of the play?

(He looks at her)

JASON
Do you ever get the feeling you're living out of your times?

PHOEBE
Yes—but then I always have. Until last Thursday I wanted to be Jane Austen.

(They are both lost in thought. Phoebe with her clipboard in hand is absentely wandering and making a sucking noise with her teeth)
JASON
I really wish you wouldn't do that.

PHOEBE
Do what?

JASON
Suck your teeth.

PHOEBE
I'm trying to think of a reason for the husband's fidelity.

JASON
So am I, but your oral hygiene isn't helping much.

(She nods thoughtfully and then suddenly falls to the floor onto her hands and goes into a series of vigorous push-ups. He absently gazes at her rear end going up and down. The double doors open and Allison enters. Thirty years old, she wears a minimum of makeup with a simple hairstyle which, combined with her understated, tailored clothes, gives her the look of an attractive, capable businesswoman. Jason looks up.)

Allison, can't you see we're working?

ALLISON
(Waving a report card in her hand)
I'm sorry, darling. I just had to tell Phoebe about Timmy's report card.

(Allison crosses to Phoebe and hands her the report card)

PHOEBE
Oh, this is marvelous! I knew he could do it!

ALLISON
Well, you're the one who deserves the gold star.

(To Jason)
Do you realize how many hours she spent tutoring Timmy? Thanks, Phoebe.

PHOEBE
Well—I like to keep my hand in. I'd better congratulate him, Where is he?

ALLISON
Outside—waiting to be congratulated.

PHOEBE
That's my boy!

(She exits. Allison watches her go as Jason picks up the loose pages, studies them)

ALLISON
Sometimes I worry about her.

JASON
Why?

ALLISON
(Sitting on the arm of sofa)
Oh, I don't know. She doesn't seem to have much of a life.

JASON
She's one of the most successful writers in America and, since she's easily the cheapest, she's also one of the richest.

(He goes back to studying the pages)
I should have her life.

ALLISON
(Curiously)
What does she do about sex?

JASON
I have no idea.

ALLISON
Don't you ever ask her?

JASON
Allison, we work in here—we don't have pajama parties.

ALLISON
Oh, I know I hear a lot about the "anguish of creation," but I also hear a lot of laughter coming out of this room.

JASON
(He regards her with some surprise)

Are you jealous of Phoebe?
ALLISON
Yes, I suppose I am. I'm jealous of the ongoing love affair you two have with the theatre.
(A small shrug)
It's an obsession I can't share.

JASON
I could say that about your career in politics.

ALLISON
Oh, I'm not complaining, just stating a fact. Anyway, I just think she should be married.

JASON
(Shrugs)
That's her choice.

ALLISON
Not really. She's very influenced by you.
(He looks at her)

JASON
I never interfere with Phoebe's personal life.

ALLISON
Oh, come on, Jason. When that nice older man from Florida was taking her out, you said, "In five years he'll be walking around with his fly zipper not quite pulled up." That killed that romance.

JASON
It was just a passing observation.

ALLISON
No, you always seem able to come up with the perfect phrase to effectively eliminate anyone who gets even slightly interested in her.

JASON
What the hell are you driving at, Allison?

ALLISON
(Evenly)
Let her go, Jason.
(He looks at her for a moment)

JASON
Why are we talking about Phoebe?

ALLISON
Because it keeps us from talking about us, I suppose.

(They are looking at one another as Phoebe enters)

PHOEBE
Sorry I took so long. Kate Mallory phoned. She's in town doing some P.R. for her latest movie and wants to meet with us to—quote—conceptualize the thematic problems of the play—unquote.

ALLISON
Does she really talk like that?

JASON
(Grumly)
She's one of those people who uses the word "artist" a lot.

ALLISON
What's she like?

PHOEBE
Well, she's a curious combination.

JASON
Mean and dumb.

PHOEBE
So how are things at City Hall?

ALLISON
Well, I wouldn't buy any municipal bonds right now.
(Checking watch)
Which reminds me, I have a budget meeting in half an hour.
(She moves to door)
Thanks again, Phoebe. Every working mother should have a friend like you.
(She exits. Jason shakes his head)

JASON
I married Grace Kelly and I ended up with Bella Abzug.
PHOEBE
She's a bright woman, Jason. She needed more intellectual stimulation than writing out place settings.

(He looks up from script, regards her for a moment)

JASON
You really like her, don't you?

PHOEBE
Don't you?

I have to. She's my wife.

PHOEBE
You never cheat on her.

JASON
How do you know?

PHOEBE
Because when you're not with her, you're with me. Why don't you?

JASON
I'm not allowed. I believe it's one of the most important rules.

PHOEBE
That's not good enough, Jason.

JASON
I hate it when you lapse back into schoolmarmishness.

(Shakes head and doesn't say anything)

All right. A few years ago I owned a delicate China teapot. One day I dropped it and it split right down the middle. Well, I glued it together and it looked as if it had never been broken. Then a few months later, for no apparent reason, it suddenly exploded into a thousand pieces. I suppose what I'm trying to say is that, despite all appearances, it's better to keep your teapot intact.

(Phoebe, furiously writing what Jason has been saying, crosses back to her chair stage right. When she is finished writing . . . )

PHOEBE
That's sweet.

JASON
Yes, I thought you'd buy that.

(Phoebe puts her clipboard down and picks up a small cassette recorder and starts it. We hear the strains of "But Not For Me" played in a lush instrumental version)

Do you have to play that music?

PHOEBE
(Absently)
It's the perfect mood music for writing this play.

JASON
But you've been playing it for six months now. I mean it's really getting on my nerves.

PHOEBE
What makes the husband suddenly fall in love with his wife again?

JASON
(Muttering)
Pity we can't use the Cinderella convention.

PHOEBE
You mean where the girl takes off her glasses, lets down her hair and he realizes she's beautiful.

JASON
Don't laugh. Audiences used to love it.

PHOEBE
You think someone can fall in love that fast.

JASON
Of course. Even happened to me once.

(Surprised, she looks at him)

It was at the Tony Awards a couple of years ago. I saw this woman from the back. She was wearing a blue taffeta dress and had gleam-
ing blonde hair that cascaded down over creamy white shoulders. I fell instantly in love and remained that way for about five seconds.

(A shrug—casually)
Then she turned around and it was you.

PHOEBE

(Flushed)
Yes—well—you're right. I mean, I don't believe we can get away with Fygmation anymore.

(We hear the front doorbell ring)
JASON
Who the hell can that be?

PHOEBE
Probably Leo Janowitz.

JASON
My God, he's been hanging around for three weeks. Doesn't he have a story by now?

PHOEBE
I thought you found him amusing.

JASON
That doesn't mean I want to adopt him.

PHOEBE
It was green actually.

JASON
Green?

PHOEBE
The dress. It was from the second scene of Somewhere Every Summer. I borrowed it from wardrobe.

JASON
I might have known you wouldn't have bought it.

(The door opens and Leo Janowitz enters. In his mid-thirties, has unruly hair, is dressed in a rumpled suit, and has a serious, reserved demeanor that almost masks a very dry sense of humor. His speech has the rough edges of the street and he tends to cut through to the core of things. He carries a small notebook and pencil)

LEO

(Without preamble—checking notes)
I know you're busy but I just wanted to check some facts. What year did you graduate from Yale?

JASON
Look, I'd prefer that you didn't mention I went to Yale.

LEO
Bad school?

JASON
I don't like anything published about my background that could cause people to pigeonhole me.

LEO
I don't get it.

PHOEBE
I think Jason means he would rather be judged by his work alone.

LEO
Yeah?

JASON
Have you seen any of my plays?

LEO
Nope. Read 'em all.

(Jason waits for the compliment. There is only a pause)

JASON
Look, there's one thing you should know—I'm not offended by flattery.

LEO
I don't know anything about the theatre.

JASON
Then why were you given this piece to write?
LEO

It's a fill-in assignment until I can get back to my serious stuff.

PHOEBE

(Qquickly)

Leo just got back from two years in Russia.

JASON

You're an expert on Russia?

LEO

Yeah—well, I speak the lingo.

JASON

How many other "lingoes" do you speak?

LEO

A few.

JASON

You mind if I ask a question?

(Leo shrugs)

I suspect that underneath that unkempt exterior you're an educated, civilized man. Why do you go to all that trouble to hide it with bad tailoring?

LEO

It's no trouble.

JASON

(Moving to door)

Is that all?

LEO

Just one more thing.

(Checking notebook)

What's your biggest regret?

JASON

That Americans can't be knighted.

(He exits)

Miss Craddock?

PHOEBE

(Crossing to him)

Yes?

(Leo grabs her and kisses her)

Please, Leo—Jason could come back in.

LEO

So? He's not your father.

PHOEBE

(Moving away)

Well, he is in a way.

LEO

Professionally?

PHOEBE

Every way. A writing collaboration is a very intimate relationship.

LEO

Yeah, I been meaning to ask you about that.

(She looks at him)

(Leo looks at her)

PHOEBE

This for the article?

LEO

I've already written the article. I wanted an excuse to see you.

PHOEBE

Why?

LEO

I got the hots for you.

PHOEBE

(Flustered)

Yes—well, I'm sorry you caught us at such a busy time.
LEO
Is it just that you've never learned to accept a compliment or do you really believe as a woman you're the pits? Every time I get personal, you change the subject.

PHOEBE
I'm sorry.
(Blushing)
I'm just not used to such—an overt response to my—girlish charms.

LEO
I want you to marry me, Phoebe.

(She stares at him)

PHOEBE
Are you serious?

LEO
Yes.
(She stares at him blankly)
What's the matter? Am I being too overt?

PHOEBE
(Sitting)
No, I—I just need a moment to absorb this.

LEO
Okay.
(He waits)
Absorbed it yet?

(She manages a nod)
So about Jason. You been to bed with him?

PHOEBE
Why—why would you even think that?

LEO
I'm a pragmatist. You're out of town together. It's an old axiom—desire plus opportunity usually equals humpage. Am I being too personal?

PHOEBE
Yes—you are.

LEO
There's a reason. I've been assigned to the Paris bureau. I leave in five weeks and I want to take you with me. The point is, I can't stick around until the third act to see who gets the girl.

PHOEBE
I see.

LEO
So—you have sex together?

PHOEBE
Once. Well, not together.

(Finally)
That's some trick.

LEO
(Finally)

PHOEBE
(Embarrassed)
I mean it was once for me. None for Jason—

(He is staring at her)
It's hard to explain. We were out of town with a show—in Chicago—and the play wasn't working—it never did work—we still don't know why. Anyway, we'd rewritten half the script, but it hadn't helped at all and we just didn't know how to fix it. One night we got back to the hotel, exhausted; our brains numb—totally depressed. We started to drink and Jason became quite drunk—and then—more out of frustration, I suppose—I don't know—he started to—to make love to me, but—right in the middle—he passed out.

LEO
In the middle?

PHOEBE
Well, if we're going to be technical, a third of the way through. It could have been a quarter. I'm only guessing, of course—I mean I have no means of comparison—with Jason, that is.
(She clears her throat)
When I woke up, he was gone.

Then what happened?

PHOEBE

That’s it.

LEO

You never discussed it?

PHOEBE

Jason obviously didn’t remember—or if he did—he didn’t want to.

LEO

Are you in love with him, Phoebe?

PHOEBE

I was.

LEO

And now?

PHOEBE

Now we just write plays together.

LEO

So will you marry me?

(He holds up his hand)

Before you say anything you should know there are three answers.

PHOEBE

Three?

LEO

“Yes”—“No”—or “Let’s talk about it some more.”

(As she opens her mouth to speak)

But first—something to help you make up your mind. I love you, Phoebe.

(He kisses her.

Jason enters now attired in an elegant suit. He stops, completely stunned by what he sees. After a moment, sensing that someone else is in the room, Phoebe and Leo break apart. Phoebe is very embarrassed but Leo is totally unflustered and casually notes Jason’s new wardrobe)

You look as if you’re going somewhere important.

JASON

I am. My tailor’s.

(He moves to desk, busies himself with some papers)

But we have to finish up some work first.

LEO

(Pleasantly)

Okay, I don’t have to be hit by a truck.

(To Phoebe)

I’ll be in touch, huh?

(She manages a nod and Leo exits. Jason is still making a
great show of studying the script pages)

PHOEBE

(Finally)

You don’t really want to work, do you?

JASON

Why do you say that?

PHOEBE

You never like to sit down and get creases before you visit your tail-

JASON

(Still studying script—overly casual)

Do you mind telling me why he was doing that?

PHOEBE

He finds me attractive.

JASON

Oh, come on, Phoebe! You expect me to buy that?

(She can’t think of a reply to this)

I mean, you must have done something to bring it on.
PHOEBE
You make it sound like a migraine headache.

JASON
(Impatiently)
You are trying to tell me that the first time he’s left alone with you, he’s overcome with desire and leaps on you?

PHOEBE
Of course not. We’ve been—seeing each other.

JASON
He’s been interviewing you at night?

PHOEBE
No, it wasn’t a professional thing. They were more—do they still call them “dates”?

JASON
(Sitting)
This is no time to be coy!

PHOEBE
(Puzzled)
Why are you so upset?

JASON
(Thrown)
Upset?

PHOEBE
You just sat down and creased yourself.

JASON
Well, naturally, I’m somewhat alarmed.

PHOEBE
Why?

JASON
(On his feet again)
You know, for someone so talented you can be remarkably obtuse! Don’t you know anything?

PHOEBE
Now you’re shouting.

JASON
Because you should know better! He’s a journalist! He’s a person who makes a living writing down what people say when they’re off guard.

PHOEBE
We didn’t discuss my work. We just—hung out together.

JASON
Hung out? Aren’t you getting a little old for that sort of thing?

PHOEBE
I wish I could think of an answer to that, but right now I’m in the middle of a hot flash.

JASON
Are you trying to tell me this is a romantic relationship?

PHOEBE
I’m not trying to tell you anything. Jason, what is the matter with you?

JASON
I don’t want to see you get hurt and depressed.

PHOEBE
Oh?

JASON
Yes, you know how difficult it is for you to be funny when you’re depressed.

PHOEBE
I don’t have any illusions about the way Leo feels about me.

(He looks at her, relaxes somewhat)

JASON
Good.
have to deal with it sometime. Better now than when it's too late.

(He looks at her, takes a breath)
Phoebe, our second act doesn't work at all!

(Phoebe just stares at him, turns and exits.
Looking stage right at Phoebe's chair)
Leo's the sort of man who wears his bowling shirt when he's not bowling. He's a lot like Jimmy Breslin—but without the polish. If they made triple-knit suits, Leo would wear them.

(The CURTAIN FALLS)

END OF SCENE 1
Scene 2

TIME: Late afternoon, six weeks later.

AT RISE: The stage is empty. The double doors open and Blanche and Phoebe enter. They take off their coats and other winter paraphernalia during following.

PHOEBE

I hope nothing's happened to him.

BLANCHE

It's not like Jason not to keep an appointment. When was the last time you saw him?

PHOEBE

About two o'clock. He stormed out of rehearsals when the actors started improvising.

BLANCHE

Maybe he went to beat up on Lee Strauss.

PHOEBE

(Phoebe moves to dressing room entrance)

(Calling)

Jason, Jason, are you here?

(There is a slight pause)
(Offstage)
Yes, what is it?

PHOEBE
Are you all right?

(Offstage)
Of course. I'll—I'll be right out.

(Phoebe and Blanche take off their coats)

BLANCHE
How are rehearsals going?

PHOEBE
Well, the leading man's a bit wooden.

BLANCHE
A bit wooden? The man's a talking tree! What else?

PHOEBE
Jason and Kate Mallory loathe each other.

BLANCHE
I'm on his side.

PHOEBE
Oh, I know she's impossible, but I really do think he's overreacting.

BLANCHE
What changes does she want?

PHOEBE
The same one. Beware of people with few ideas, Blanche. They cling to them with such tenacity.

BLANCHÉ
She still wants you to rewrite the ending?

PHOEBE
She doesn't want her character to go back to her husband. She's got this idea in her head that she's the Joan of Arc of the seventies and keeps saying, "Why should I end up with any man? Why can't I go off and make a life of my own?"

BLANCHE
How about you, my love? You look harassed.

PHOEBE
That's funny. I feel suicidal.

BLANCHE
Are you going to marry that nice young man?

PHOEBE
Well, I've gone from "no" to "perhaps"—but I'm not fooling anybody—not even me.

BLANCHE
Isn't he leaving for Paris in a couple of days?

PHOEBE
Oh, it's impossible, Blanche! Even if I wanted to get married, I can't walk out on Jason now.

BLANCHE
He'd survive.

(Shrugs)
I'd just hate to see you turn into one of those dotty women writers who drink too much and wear hats.

(Shrugs)
I'd just hate to see you turn into one of those dotty women writers who drink too much and wear hats.

(Shrugs)
I'd just hate to see you turn into one of those dotty women writers who drink too much and wear hats.

(Jason enters from his dressing room and crosses directly to his desk)

JASON
Pour me a double, will you, Blanche?

BLANCHE
Have you been eavesdropping?
JASON
Of course not. Who can hear anything over the clash of your bracelets?

BLANCHE
What are you doing back here anyway? You were supposed to meet us at Sardi's.

JASON
Yes—well, something came up.

(At this point, Kate Mallory enters from the dressing room.

She is a soft, pretty woman in her late thirties with a deceptively gentle, feminine manner and sweet smile. She has absolutely no sense of humor.

The two women look at her in surprise.

This surprise gradually changes to puzzlement, because, although fully clothed, there is something slightly "off" about Kate's appearance. We and they will realize that she is wearing her dress inside out. Kate never becomes aware of this)

Uh—Kate and I decided that our differences were undermining the —uh, creative process, so I invited her over so we could discuss our problems frankly and arrive at a reasonable solution.

KATE
And, of course—as always happens when two human beings reach out to one another—it worked.

JASON
The point is, we discovered that we're both after the same thing—the best possible production. We've just been coming at it from two different places.

(Kate notices Phoebe peering at her in a dazed manner)

KATE
Is there something the matter?

PHOEBE
What? Uh, no.

KATE
I sense some bad vibes in the room.

BLANCHE
It's probably the radiator.

JASON
Would you care for a drink?

KATE
No, thanks. I stopped four years ago when I woke up in a motel room with those four jockeys and the Vice President.

(There is a pause)

BLANCHE
(Finally)
Who were the jockeys?

(The other three turn to look at her. She shrugs)

I'm not political.

(Kate moves downstage for her coat, revealing a faded large label on the back of her dress. Now even Jason is aware of the way she is dressed)

KATE
I can't seem to find my coat.

(She turns, notices the other three staring at her)

Why is everyone staring at me?

BLANCHE
(Finally)
Star quality?

(Jason picks up her coat, quickly moves to her, holds it up for her to put on)

JASON
Here's your coat.

KATE
I'll carry it, thanks. Should I call a cab or can someone give me a lift?
BLANCHE
My car's outside. Where can I drop you?

KATE
At the park. I'll walk the rest of the way.

(Blanche moves to get her coat)

BLANCHE
(Just making conversation)
Are you enjoying your stay?

KATE
(With a sweet smile)
Oh, I just love New York. Every time I come here, I feel like going down on the whole city.

(There is a moment's embarrassed pause)

BLANCHE
Well, you certainly have the weather for it.

(A beat)

KATE
I want you to know a beautiful thing happened this afternoon. Two human beings made contact. Now let's go to work!

(She exits. Blanche shoots an incredulous look at the still stunned Phoebe and exits. There is a small, tense pause)

JASON
Yes—well—

(Avoiding her eyes, he moves briskly to the desk and picks up some script pages)
We need to take ten minutes out of the play. Nothing in life should last longer than two hours.

(Phoebe, who hasn't moved, clears her throat)
We also need a new curtain line for scene four. You have any ideas?

(She doesn't answer, but clears her throat and stares straight ahead)
Phoebe, are you going to stand there making raspy, little noises or are we going to work?

PHOEBE
(Tightly—a touch of the schoolteacher)
It's no good you know.

JASON
What isn't?

PHOEBE
We all noticed, Jason. That woman had her dress inside out.

JASON
(Flushed)
So, she's sloppy. You should be able to identify with that.

PHOEBE
Her label was showing!

JASON
(Uncomfortably)
Phoebe, we have a lot of work to do here.

PHOEBE
(In a dry, strained voice)
You went to bed with her, didn't you?

JASON
You want me to stand up and share it with the rest of the class?

PHOEBE
Don't deny it.

JASON
Look, do you want to fix this play or not?

(She stares at him, absolutely stunned, her worst fears confirmed)

PHOEBE
My God, how could you!!

JASON
Well—it wasn't easy.

(She is staring at him, her eyes welling up with tears)
Phoebe, I didn't commit an axe murder! Why are you staring at me like that?

PHOEBE

It's—it's so—unprofessional!

JASON

Actually, it was very professional.

PHOEBE

(Tightly—moving away)
Well, I'm glad she has some technique somewhere.

JASON

What I mean was it started out as a professional thing.

(A trifle desperately)
Look, I did it for you too.

PHOEBE

(Icily)
Did I enjoy it?

JASON

I was just trying to—improve my relationship with her.

PHOEBE

(Exploding)
Oh, don't try to romanticize it! You've been cheating! You committed adultery!

(He stares at her)

JASON

You know, I don't believe this. You sound like a wife.

PHOEBE

(Still angry but flustered)
I happen to be a friend of your wife.

JASON

It's not the same thing.

PHOEBE

I'm your partner!

JASON

Exactly. You're not my priest, you're not even my mistress—and my private life is none of your business.

PHOEBE

I don't care what you do in your private life, but—but you did it right here—in our office—where we work!

JASON

Phoebe, it's not a cathedral. Now what the hell is the matter with you?

PHOEBE

I thought I was working with a man of honor.

JASON

Did I ever say or do one thing to make you believe that?

PHOEBE

You said you wanted to keep your teapot intact!

JASON

Oh, for God's sake—you sound just like a woman.

PHOEBE

(Tightly)
It's one of my best impressions.

JASON

Yes, that's always been the problem.

(He looks at him)

Well, if you were a man you wouldn't be carrying on like this. We wouldn't even be talking about it. At least not in the same way.

(She doesn't say anything)

We'd have a couple of laughs and forget it. You'd cover for me. You'd be a pal—a buddy.

PHOEBE

(Finally)
I find that—revolting.
JASON
Look, what exactly would you like me to say?

PHOEBE
I'm trying—very hard—to understand your actions.
   (A beat)
Do you love her?
   
   (Incredulously)
Love her? I can't even hear her from the balcony!

PHOEBE
Then why?

JASON
Oh, for God's sake, don't you understand anything about sex?

PHOEBE
Evidently not.
   (She is having trouble controlling her tears and moves to get her coat)

JASON
What are you doing?

PHOEBE
Leaving.

JASON
All right, I know it's been a long day.
   (He sits with pages of script)
I'll work on the cuts and tomorrow we can concentrate on the—

PHOEBE
I mean permanently.
   (He looks at her as she stamps her feet into her boots)

JASON
Are you serious?
   (She doesn't answer)

PHOEBE
You'd actually walk out on a ten-year partnership over something so stupid and trivial as this?

JASON
(In a strange voice)

PHOEBE
Goodbye, Jason.
   (She moves toward the door and opens it. Just as she is about to exit, Jason, not looking at her, speaks quietly)

PHOEBE
Did you know I had my nose fixed?
   (She stops. Finally, her curiosity gets the better of her. She turns)

JASON
What?

PHOEBE
My nose. It's fixed. I had it done years ago.

JASON
(Bewildered)

PHOEBE
What has that to do with—

JASON
I'm trying to explain why this afternoon happened.

PHOEBE
(Baffled)

JASON
She found out and blackmailed you into going to bed with her?

PHOEBE
My teeth are capped, too.

JASON
I really don't understand why—all of them?

PHOEBE
(Irritably)

JASON
No, not all of them! Look, will you stop interrupting? I'm trying to make a point. Please sit down, and hear me out. After ten years, you at least owe me that.
(After a moment, she closes door, sits and waits. Jason starts speaking, not looking at her)

My real name isn’t Jason Carmichael. It’s Joey Mahovalich. I didn’t graduate from Yale—I never even finished high school. I grew up, a fat little kid with a bad nose and a worse accent on 12th Street in the South Side of Detroit. Did you ever notice I have no relatives? My father wasn’t a lawyer—he worked for the Gas Company. I never knew him—he ran off with a woman who lived upstairs when I was four years old. My mother took a job in the cafeteria at the G.M. plant so I lived pretty much on the streets. She died when I was thirteen and I was put in a series of foster homes. I was arrested three times before I was fifteen for stealing—mostly food from vending machines.

(He looks at her)
Do you know who I really am?

PHOEBE

Oliver Twist?

(He doesn’t smile. She makes a gesture of ‘forget that’)

JASON

I’m a totally manufactured man. I didn’t like my life, hated what I was—so I became someone else. You know why I married Allison? I couldn’t get over the fact that a girl with her background would want someone like me. But she did. My God, now I had the ‘right’ wife. So there I was—the successful, urbane playwright—the host of the most glittering dinner parties in town. Fooled a lot of people; but I never believed it. Inside the Saville Row suits there was always the ugly, fat little kid waiting to be found out. So much for the past. Lately, I’ve been feeling more—unattractive than usual. Things between Allison and me haven’t been—Look, I’ll be forty-six next month. Middle age. Pick your cliché.

(She remains silent, her face impassive. Finally)
And none of that is the real reason this happened. I was angry at you—because of Leo. I suppose—in some way—I wanted to lash back.

(She is too astounded to say anything. A pause)

All right. I was terrified of losing you. So you see before you an insecure, middle-aged man who just this afternoon made a complete ass of himself and couldn’t regret it more.

PHOEBE

They did an incredible job on your nose.

JASON

Is that all you have to say?

PHOEBE

Look, you’ve given me some understanding of why you did what you did. But, right now, I’m still not too fond of you.

JASON

Well, that makes two of us.

(She takes her hat, gloves and scarf off and picks up the script he has been working on from the coffee table)

PHOEBE

I think you may have cut too deeply here. The last line contains the right set up for the Act One curtain line.

JASON

Is class dismissed, Miss Craddock? I’ve been thinking about the end of the play. I think I have the solution.

PHOEBE

Good. Now all we have to do is come up with the problem.

JASON

Phoebe, it’s all too neat, too slick. You know what I mean?

PHOEBE

Yes. Professional.

JASON

Pat.

PHOEBE

(Warily)
What do you have in mind?
JASON
Well, it’s not clearly formulated in my mind yet—I’m just thinking out loud—but supposing she doesn’t stay with the lover or return to her husband?

PHOEBE
That only leaves the seventy-five-year-old gardener.

JASON
(Doing a very good acting job)
I don’t know—I just have a gut feeling about it. Wait a minute—why does she have to end up with anyone? I mean this is 1975. It’ll give it a more contemporary feeling.

PHOEBE
You mean “make her a Joan of Arc of the seventies.”

JASON
What a good idea.

(Phoebe throws the script at Jason, exits briefly to the dressing room and returns with a battered suitcase. She throws it on the ground, opens it)

What are you doing?

PHOEBE
Packing!

JASON
Because you don’t like my idea for a second act?

(Falsely jolly)
Really, a simple “no” would be sufficient.

(During the following scene Phoebe gets various articles from around the room and throws them into the case.

The articles include a portable typewriter, a number of books, scripts, assorted objects from the desk drawers, sneakers, etc. Her “packing” is noisy and punctuates some of her remarks)

PHOEBE
No, it wouldn’t.

JASON
Oh, come on, Phoebe. You’ve lost all sense of proportion.

PHOEBE
(Exploding)
And you’ve lost your integrity!! You’ve sold out to that woman!!

JASON
One sell-out and I’ve lost my integrity? Look, do you know what you’re doing?

PHOEBE
I’m getting married, going to Paris, and having three children.

JASON
But you can’t leave right now! We have a play in rehearsal!

PHOEBE
Send me the reviews.

JASON
That’s not good enough, damn it! You have responsibilities here.

PHOEBE
I’m sure you and Kate Mallory can take care of any rewrites.

JASON
I’m not talking about the play. What about the children?

PHOEBE
I’m not their mother.

JASON
You’re more than their mother. You like them. You listen to them.

PHOEBE
Well, maybe if you’d been the father you should I wouldn’t have had to spend so much time with them.

JASON
Wait a minute—there has to be more to this than an artistic difference of opinion. Just what is bothering you, Phoebe?

(Shes stops packing, looks at him)
PHOEBE
Bothering me? All right, I'll tell you what's "bothering" me. I don't like you anymore! You're a vain, arrogant, insensitive, selfish bully!

JASON
I am not vain!

(She stabs a finger in the direction of a chair)

PHOEBE
Then why do you always sit on that couch?

(Jason is nonplussed)

You know why? So you can look at yourself all day in—

(Pointing at mirror)

That mirror! I think you're about to get an idea but you're admiring yourself!

JASON
(Coldly)
Is that all?

PHOEBE
No, it's not all. Whenever we eat in a restaurant you always take the best seat with your back to the wall so everyone can see you!

JASON
And so they can't see you! You dress like a walking garage sale!

(She stops packing to look at him)

PHOEBE
My father has a word for people like you—"jerk"!

JASON
I see your gift for language runs in the family.

PHOEBE
You said you liked my father.

JASON
I lied. Your father is a boring, illiterate, old poop!

(Pointing at book she is holding)

Wait a minute—that was given to both of us!

PHOEBE
It was given to me!

JASON
Read the inscription!

PHOEBE
Oh, keep the damn book!

(She throws it at him and it hits him in the chest)

JASON
You could have broken a rib! I mean just who do you think you are?

PHOEBE
(Hysterically)
I'll tell you who I am! You're full of shit—that's who I am!

(He is too astounded to reply.

She goes back to packing)

God, I'll be so glad not to have to face you every day!

JASON
(Angered)
You think it's been easy living with your relentless perkins all these years? Have you any idea how depressing it is to be around that much—niceness?

PHOEBE
(Thrown)
Niceness is depressing?

JASON
Mealy-mouthed niceness! Like that time when that actress propositioned you. She asked, "Are you gay?" and do you know what you said?

PHOEBE
(Puzzled)
I said, "No, I'm not."

JASON
No, you didn't. You said, "No, I'm not—but thank you for asking!!"
(At this point Allison enters but stops when she sees what is going on. Neither Jason nor Phoebe notices her)

You're afraid of offending anyone?

PHOEBE

Yes, well, maybe that's why I say "goodbye" when I leave a room and "hello" when I come in.

JASON

Very original.

PHOEBE

You never say "hello" or "goodbye." You just leave. It's the ultimate conceit!

JASON

Better than your stammering, blushing humble act. Let me tell you something—you're not talented enough to be that humble!

(At this point he notices Allison.
Phoebe also turns and looks at her.
They watch her as she tiptoes across the room, picks up some mending from Phoebe's corner downstream right. She tiptoes back to the door)

ALLISON

I'm sorry. I didn't realize you were working.

(Allison exits.
Phoebe picks up a staple gun, holds it up)

PHOEBE

This is mine.

(Jason moves to the desk)

JASON

Here, you want to take some paper? You want half the pencils?

(Throwing objects from the desk)

Paper clips? Used typewriter ribbons? Wait a minute—there's half a box of Kleenex in the dressing room!

PHOEBE

I'm walking out of here with exactly what I came in with!

JASON

Plus fifty per cent of my royalties!

PHOEBE

Which I more than earned!!

JASON

And from which you have the first nickel—plus towels and soap from every hotel we ever stayed in. You know what I really despise about you? I loathe your—

PHOEBE

Cheapness.

JASON

Your finishing my sentences for me!

PHOEBE

Someone has to do it!

JASON

(Infuriated)

You really want to know what I've always really hated about you?

PHOEBE

Why not? You've gone this far.

JASON

I've always hated your ass!

PHOEBE

Eloquent. Very eloquent.

JASON

I mean, I literally hate your ass!! You and your damned exercises! Every morning for ten years I turn around and find I'm addressing your rear end. Believe me, it's not a pretty sight.

PHOEBE

(Hurt—fighting back the tears)
Yes—well—I think I’ll get a second opinion on that. Goodbye, Jason.

JASON

Phoebe, you can’t leave.
(A last desperate plea)
I named one of my children after you!

PHOEBE

(Finally—quietly)
It’s not enough, Jason.
(She goes to close the suitcase but it is so loaded it won’t close. In a mixture of frustration and rage, she kicks the case)
Oh, to hell with it!
(Phoebe takes a small tank of goldfish under her arm and crosses to the door)

JASON

It won’t last three months! Once he sees those substandard flannel nightgowns he’ll run for the nearest fire escape!
(This really stings her. She turns around)

PHOEBE

(With dignity)
I only have one reply to that. Even an egg takes three minutes.

JASON

(Baffled)
What?

PHOEBE

(Tearfully yelling)
You were inadequate in Chicago!
(She slams the door, leaving an outraged Jason. He crosses to the overstuffed suitcase and kicks it violently. It flies open and the impact has jolted the tape recorder and the music of “But Not For Me” fills the room. The anger drains out of Jason as he lifts the recorder out of the debris. He puts the recorder down when he notices her red baseball cap on the top of all the junk. He picks it up, crosses slowly to the sofa, finally puts on the cap and sits dejectedly)

JASON

Oh, Phoebe—you always were such a sloppy sentimentalist.
(The CURTAIN FALLS)

END OF ACT TWO
Scene 1

TIME: Two years later. A mid-September morning.

AT RISE: The stage is empty. The room looks as if it hasn’t been cleaned in weeks and is littered with old newspapers, magazines, dirty shirts, some jackets and trousers thrown haphazardly over chairs, paper coffee cups. The desk and tables are piled with scripts and mail, mostly unopened. Blanche, dressed for fall and carrying some containers of send-out food, enters, surveys the room with distaste.

BLANCHE

(Calling)
Jason! Jason, it’s Blanche! Jason, I brought you some hot food! Jason!

(Jason, unshaven, wearing some wrinkled trousers, shirt, and an old, woolen cardigan, and looking very much the worse for wear, enters from the dressing room)

JASON

(Quietly)
Blanche, you’re not in the Follies anymore. You don’t have to be heard at the back of the house.

(She looks at him)
BLANCHE
You know if you expect your social life to pick up, you've gotta keep the phone on the hook.

(He moves to bar. She picks up the phone and puts it back on the desk)

God, you look awful. Have you seen a doctor lately? I mean, you really look unhealthy.

JASON
Look, will you stop reviewing me if I give you a drink?

BLANCHE
It's only eleven a.m.

JASON
I have a watch, Blanche.
(He pours himself a drink as she clears a space for food cartons during following)

BLANCHE
I don't know how you can live in this mess. Don't you ever have a cleaning woman?

JASON
A cleaning woman? Listen, I can barely afford to keep the Bentley.

BLANCHE
I still don't understand why you don't sell this place or at least rent out the two top floors.

JASON
Blanche, I'm simply going through a dry spell—I'm not quite ready to open a boarding house yet.

BLANCHE
Two years isn't a dry spell—it's retirement.

JASON
I've had a few distractions.

BLANCHE
Okay, you were upset when Phoebe left—I can understand that. I could even understand when you were divorced and didn't draw a sober breath for a year. What I don't understand is why you and the typewriter have become natural enemies.

(He looks at her, sighs)

JASON
I tried, my love. Believe me, I tried but—
(He shakes head)
—it's just—too damned hard.

BLANCHE
You don't even read the scripts I send you. You know that last play was by a young writer who's had three Off-Broadway productions that got very good reviews.

JASON
(Mildly)
Blanche, just because he's never had a commercial success doesn't necessarily mean he's talented.

(She looks at him for a moment)

BLANCHE
Why did you tell that man from CBS you'd only write for TV if your children got rickets?

JASON
I was trying to let him down easily.

(She hands him a carton of soup)

BLANCHE
Here, drink this soup.
(She watches him as he gingerly tastes soup)

Have you read Phoebe's novel yet?

JASON
Novel?

BLANCHE
Oh, come on, Jason—it's been on the best seller list for weeks. Five major studios are falling over themselves trying to buy the movie rights.
JASON

Please, I’m trying to eat.
(He puts down soup, gets up, moves away to find cigarette)
If you don’t mind, I’d rather not listen to the dubious accomplishments of a woman who ruined my life.

BLANCHE

What did Phoebe ever do to you?

JASON

She’s a literary opportunist. She drained me dry and then she left me.

BLANCHE

(Incredulous)
She got married.

JASON

Exactly. You don’t get married and then have a best seller suddenly pop out of your head. She must have been hoarding the idea all the time we were partners. That’s like a wife secretly siphoning off your money into a Swiss bank account.

BLANCHE

You said she ruined your life.

JASON

She caused my divorce.

BLANCHE

(Surprised)
How?
(He looks at her)

JASON

For that you’ll have to wait for my memoirs.

BLANCHE

She’s back in town.

JASON

Who cares?

BLANCHE

They arrived three days ago. Leo managed to get himself assigned back here so Phoebe could publicize her book.

How is she?

JASON

BLANCHE

You can see for yourself. She’s due here any moment.

JASON

(Alarmed)
I don’t want to see her. I’m not ready for that yet.

BLANCHE

When will you be ready?

JASON

When I have three hits running on Broadway.
(He picks up phone, holds up receiver)
Here—you’d better stop her.

BLANCHE

Why?

JASON

(Impatiently)
Because I don’t want her to see me like this with my hair in curlers wearing a cheap kimonol

(Blanche hasn’t moved. He puts the receiver down on the desk and moves to get his raincoat)

Anyway, I have appointments all day.

BLANCHE

Will you take some advice from an old broad who loves you like a mother?

(He looks at her)

JASON

When you see her, don’t put on airs. You’re much more appealing when you’re vulnerable.
(He grabs raincoat and starts for the door but stops as Phoebe enters. She is impeccably groomed and coiffured and looks absolutely stunning in a chic, designer suit. Her manner has also changed and she projects an image of confident sophistication. They look at one another for a long moment)

PHOEBE

(Finally)
Hello, Jason.

JASON

Hello.

(There is a pause. She looks around the room)

PHOEBE

I see you’ve redecorated.

JASON

I see you have, too.

PHOEBE

Oh, I took off my glasses and let down my hair. Works every time.

(She is looking at him, trying to hide her surprise at his appearance)

JASON

I know. I look awful.

PHOEBE

(Easily)
I wouldn’t say that.

JASON

Neither would I, actually. Blanche said it.

BLANCHE

Well, look at him. His skin has an unhealthy pallor, his face is all rumpled and I’m sure his liver is the size of the Palladium.

JASON

Nothing left but to shoot me.

(As Blanche heads for door, panicky at being left alone with Phoebe)

Where are you going?

BLANCHE

To make some coffee.

JASON

Oh, sit down. You don’t even know your way to the kitchen.

BLANCHE

It’s easy. I just keep walking until the floor gets hard and cold and if I look up and see a lot of white furniture, that’s it.

(She exits. There is an awkward pause)

JASON

How’s Leo?

PHOEBE

Fine. He’s out apartment hunting right now.

(Jason nods)

Oh, Timmy and little Phoebe send their love.

JASON

You saw them?

PHOEBE

We drove up to Tarrytown for the weekend.

JASON

How’s Allison?

PHOEBE

Very well. I suppose you know she’s running for Congress.

(He nods. A small pause)

You live alone?

JASON

All alone.

(A small pause)
PHOEBE
I'm sorry I walked out on you, Jason. I mean at that time—in the middle of a production.

JASON
It wouldn't have made any difference if you'd stayed. Nothing could have helped that play.
(He frowns)
And, since we're on that subject, I said a lot of things in the heat of anger before you left that—

PHOEBE
You don't have to apologize for—

JASON
No, no—there's something I said that's really been bothering me and I'd like to retract it. It was stupid and childish and I should never have said it.

PHOEBE
What?

JASON
I never had my nose fixed.

PHOEBE
I know.

JASON
How?

PHOEBE
It was out of character.

JASON
For me to have it done?

PHOEBE
No, for you to admit it.
(He gives her a wintry smile)

JASON
I'd forgotten what an excellent judge of character you were.

PHOEBE
Why are you nursing such a grudge?

JASON
(He turns to face her)

PHOEBE
You're asking that seriously?

JASON
It's rather important we clear the air.

PHOEBE
Why?

JASON
You'll understand later. All right, I admit I left you at an inopportune time—but is that any reason to go into a childish sulk?

PHOEBE
Childish? You turned my life upside down, you ruined my marriage!

JASON
(Puzzled)

PHOEBE
How did I ruin your marriage?

JASON
(Evasively)

PHOEBE
Look, I really don't see any point in rehearsing all this.

JASON
In what way did I ruin your marriage?

PHOEBE
All right! Do you know why Allison left me?

JASON
She found out about you and Kate Mallory.

PHOEBE
And how do you think she found out? Why do you think she kept her nose to the scent like a Tennessee bloodhound?

JASON
I have no idea.
JASON
Allison kept asking me why you’d walked out and wouldn’t accept any of the reasons I gave her. It was maddening. She said for you to leave me I must have done something absolutely horrendous.

PHOEBE
Why did she think that?

JASON
Look, she was quite demented at the time—totally irrational—it made no sense at all.

PHOEBE
What didn’t?

JASON
She said that all the years you and I were together you’d been in love with me.

PHOEBE
I was in love with you.

JASON
Well—now you can see why I bear you a certain—animosity.

PHOEBE
No, I don’t.

JASON
For God’s sake, you might have had the decency to tell me!

PHOEBE
You were married. You know what a stickler for form you were.

JASON
(Uncomfortably)
Well, you certainly kept it hidden very well.

PHOEBE
(Calmly)
Allison knew.

JASON
Yes—well, I don’t know how she sensed that.

PHOEBE
Maybe it was the way I hung on every word you said and started to perspire when you came within two feet of me.

JASON
I have that effect on a lot of people.

(He sits)
Anyway, I resent being the last to know.

PHOEBE
You were the first, Jason. You always knew and you enjoyed it. Oh, I can’t say I blame you. You had the best of everything. Two women who adored you and had devoted their lives to satisfying your every whim.

(She turns to look at him)
And you revelled in it.

JASON
Did you come up with that idea all by yourself?

PHOEBE
No, I went into analysis.

JASON
Why?

PHOEBE
You’re an arrogant, often unfeeling, difficult man and yet for some ten years I was totally infatuated by you. I am now married to a nice, sensitive man and if my marriage was going to work, I believed it was important to come up with the reasons for my relationship with you.

JASON
(Quietly)
Why do you think I’m unfeeling?

PHOEBE
Jason, do you know that the only time I ever saw you cry was when a pit orchestra struck up? Never in real life.

JASON
Tears are simply the appearance of emotion. Not emotion itself.
PHOEBE
You mean you could be feeling something but it's for you to know and everyone else to find out?

JASON
What other blinding revelations did you experience?

PHOEBE
That when I found out about you and Kate Mallory I was angry with you because I really wanted you to make love with me.

JASON
You know, I liked you better before you came out of your shell.

PHOEBE
It's not easy for me to stand here and say these things, Jason.

JASON
It's not a lot of fun where I'm standing either. Look, is this encounter part of your therapy?

PHOEBE
Partly. Naturally, I wanted to find out how I would feel when I saw you.

JASON
How's it going so far?

PHOEBE
Are you just being flip or do you really want an answer?

JASON
You used to be able to tell.

PHOEBE
I also wanted to see you for professional reasons. Have you read Romantic Comedy?

JASON
What's that?

PHOEBE
It's the title of my book.

JASON
I'm sorry, I've been rather pressed for time lately.

(She looks at him)

Well, don't look at me as if I haven't completed a homework assignment. I simply haven't got around to it yet.

PHOEBE
I thought you might be curious. No matter. I want to adapt it into a play and I want you to collaborate with me on it.

Why?

PHOEBE
There are two reasons. First, I'd like to tell you how I got the idea.

JASON
Is that absolutely necessary?

PHOEBE
It was a funny quote by Hemingway.

JASON
Yes, he's always cracked me up.

PHOEBE
He said that he and a woman had been in love for forty years but whenever she was single he was married and when he was single she was married. He said “we were the victims of unsynchronized passion.” That started me thinking about us. I really started the book as therapy. Of course, in the writing I fantasized the relationship to make it interesting. I suppose what I'm saying is that you should write it with me because I stole your character.

JASON
Isn't this where you came in fourteen years ago?

PHOEBE
Well, that didn't turn out too badly, did it?

JASON
You said there were two reasons.
PHOEBE

The second one should be obvious. You’re the best dramatist of this sort of material I know.

JASON

There’s a third reason.

PHOEBE

Oh?

JASON

You think I need the money and my life is a shambles.

PHOEBE

Yes—well, I’d be less than honest if I said I wasn’t aware of that. But that has nothing—well, very little—to do with my offer. It’s not your lack of money that worries me, Jason. It’s your lack of spirit. You need to work.

(Jason slowly rises)

JASON

(Icily angry)

I am not a charity case!!

PHOEBE

I never said you were.

JASON

(Tightly controlled)

No, you said a lot more. Well, now let me say a few things. You come waltzing in here, clutching your tawdry little best seller and expect me to kiss the hem of your Givenchy dress! Well, you’ve made a few assumptions that need correcting. First, I may have been going through a somewhat fallow period but my career did not freeze into a “still life” the moment you left. I was writing plays when you were a teenage ticket taker and I suspect I’ll be writing them long after you’re a plump matron making funny speeches about your septic tank to the P.T.A. Next, your infantile psychological insights about my character and your infatuation with an unfeeling, insensitive older man. Well, I’m exactly ten years older than you, which doesn’t exactly make me an aging Caesar to your pubescent Cleopatra!

(She moves to get her things)

Wait a minute, I’m not through!

PHOEBE

I know. You haven’t come up with a good exit line yet.

JASON

(Growing ever more angry)

Next, your concern over my alleged lack of emotion. How the hell can you presume to know what I feel or don’t feel? How do you know that when you left I wasn’t quite—bruised.

(She doesn’t say anything.

He picks up her baseball cap, waves it in front of her)

Well, I kept your damned hat, for God’s sake!

(He throws hat away)

Of course, I was remembering a warm, vulnerable, compassionate, unique girl who used to blush, not the woman you’ve become! You know what you’ve become? You’ve become—CRISP! One of those confident, crisp fashion-plate bitches who think they know the secret of the world and I wouldn’t work with you if you were a combination of Molière and Mary Tyler Moore!!

(Stung, her tears are now partly from anger)

And, since this is obviously the last time we’ll ever see each other, I was not inadequate in Chicago! I happened to be drunk and when a man is drunk, he—uh—he—

(He suddenly doubles over, his face contorted with pain, gasping for breath)

PHOEBE

What is it?

JASON

You’d better—stick around. I—think—I’m having—a heart attack.

(He collapses rather theatrically onto the floor)
PHOEBE
Oh, come on, Jason. We did that in *Innocent Deception* and it didn't work well there either.

JASON
(Groaning)
Stay with me, Phoebe.

PHOEBE
Jason?
(He doesn't answer.
Uncertainly)
Jason, don't play the fool. This is not funny.
(He turns his head towards her, breathing with difficulty. The realization hits her that he is not faking)
Oh, my God!
(She rushes to his side; frantically tries to find his pulse, races for a bottle of brandy, uncorks it, rushes back, kneels beside him, raises his head)
Here—drink this brandy!

JASON
(Feebly)
What—what year—is it?
(Phoebe is giving Jason mouth-to-mouth resuscitation when Blanche comes in with the coffee tray)

BLANCHE
Well, I'm glad to see you two finally got together.

PHOEBE
Blanche, he's not breathing... call an ambulance.
(Phoebe goes back to the mouth-to-mouth, Blanche goes to the telephone as the *CURTAIN FALLS*)

END OF SCENE ONE

Scene 2

TIME: Late afternoon, three weeks later.

AT RISE: Jason is propped up on a pulled-out sofa bed which has replaced the sofa, with a tray across his lap, yelling for Phoebe. He is wearing a robe and pajamas and is sporting a sling that supports his right wrist. The room has also been restored to its usual elegant charm.

JASON
(Calling)
Phoebe! Phoebe, I need you! Phoebe!
(Phoebe, looking harassed and somewhat untidy, enters carrying a pile of mail)

PHOEBE
I heard you the first time.

JASON
I need you to cut up my food.

PHOEBE
Tapioca?
(Phoebe puts the pile of letters on the desk)

PHOEBE
Here's your mail.

JASON
You can read it to me later.
PHOEBE
Jason, I'm not Annie Sullivan. It's bad enough that I have to feed you.
(She takes spoon, feeds him through following)

JASON
Serves you right for trying to kill me.

PHOEBE
I was trying to save you.

JASON
You almost suffocated me.

PHOEBE
You should have said something.

JASON
I tried. That's when you fractured my wrist with your bony knee.

PHOEBE
Could you chew a little faster? I have about a million things to do.

JASON
You shouldn't overdo it, Phoebe.
(She looks at him)

You're looking—I don't know—wispy.

PHOEBE
Eat.
(Leo enters carrying a pile of telephone messages. He moves to the two of them, peers at Jason)

LEO
So what do you think? Will he ever tap dance again?

JASON
I'll never eat tapioca again. What are those?

LEO
Telephone messages. I feel like a bookie.

JASON
Why has the phone stopped ringing?

LEO
I left a message on your answering service that you'd died. Thought it might slow 'em down.
(He stands, waiting. Phoebe looks at him)

PHOEBE
Something on your mind?

LEO
Sure. Dinner.

PHOEBE
(Annoyed)
You're waiting for me to make it?

LEO
(Evenly)
No, I'll make it. I just thought it might be nice to eat together for a change.

(Phoebe is immediately contrite)

PHOEBE
Honey, I'm sorry. Give me about fifteen minutes.

JASON
Better make it thirty.
(They look at him)

Phoebe has to give me my massage first.
(Leo moves towards the door)

Oh, Leo, would you mind drawing my bath for me?
(Leo turns and looks at him. We hear front doorbell)

LEO
I have to answer the door and do the silver first.
(He exits. Phoebe starts to dressing room with two bed pillows)
JASON
He seems a bit ticked off. Is he?

PHOEBE
Can’t you tell?

JASON
Hard with Leo. He has a face like a totem pole. Probably his journalistic training.

(She looks at him but doesn’t have a chance to answer as Blanche enters)

BLANCHE
How’s “Camille” today?

PHOEBE
(Exiting to dressing room)
Oh, I think we can take him off the critical list.

BLANCHE
Jason, I brought the contract for you to sign. Have you read Phoebe’s novel yet?

JASON
I’ll try and get to it today.

(She looks at him)
Blanche, I’m recovering from a heart attack.

A mild heart attack.

JASON
I know. But when your heart stops beating, it’s inclined to bring you up short.

(Surprised at his seriousness, she regards him for a moment)

BLANCHE
You okay?

JASON
(Shrugs)

Something like this tends to make you reexamine your life. Decide what’s really important.

BLANCHE
What is important to you, Jason?

JASON
Phoebe. She always has been—I’ve just never admitted it to myself before.

(Phoebe enters from dressing room carrying a portable massage table)

BLANCHE
You’re giving him a massage?

JASON
There’s a danger of my developing bed sores.

BLANCHE
You’ve been out of bed for days.

JASON
Well, we thought it would give me a psychological lift.

BLANCHE
Oh, we did, did we?
(To Phoebe)
You know what I think? I think your nurturing instinct has run amok.

JASON
Blanche, I’d appreciate it if you didn’t come charging in here telling Phoebe how to run her ward.

(He exits to dressing room. Phoebe closes the sofa bed through following)

BLANCHE
Phoebe, I hope somebody is striking a medal for you somewhere. Beyond the call and all that.

PHOEBE
There was nobody else. Besides, I felt I owed it to him.
BLANCHE
How does Leo feel about it?

PHOEBE
It was his suggestion.
(Noticing Blanche's surprise)
Well, we needed an apartment and Leo's a practical man. Of course I don't think he realized just how demanding a patient Jason would be. He makes Sheridan Whiteside seem like a saint. That's the character in The Man Who Came to Dinner who—

BLANCHE
Honey, I know who Sheridan Whiteside is. I saw the original production.
(As Phoebe looks at her)
My mother took me.

PHOEBE
I'm sorry. When I talk to Leo I have to explain any theatrical references.

BLANCHE
What do you two talk about?
(Phoebe looks at her)
Well, you don't seem to have a lot in common.

PHOEBE
That's my fault, not his. I've led such a narrow life, really. It wasn't until I got to Paris that I realized just how frivolous, vain and self-absorbed people in the theatre are.

BLANCHE
Missed us that much, huh?
(Phoebe sets up the massage table)
Listen, don't you think all this is a bit dangerous? Rekindled passion, secret yearnings—all that good stuff?

PHOEBE
Blanche, you don't really believe you only meet one person who's right just once in a lifetime?

BLANCHE
In my case—even less. Listen, honey, I married three times. Once for sex, once for money and once for good conversation. None of them are what they're cracked up to be.

PHOEBE
What else is left?

BLANCHE
Beats the hell out of me.
(Jason enters from the dressing room with Phoebe's book in his hand. He crosses directly to Blanche)

JASON
This book of Phoebe's is filthy!

BLANCHE
Are you trying to tell us you've never heard those words before?

JASON
It's not just the words. It's the sex passages. My God, they're positively pornographic!

PHOEBE
Jason, I was dealing with a young girl's fantasies about—

JASON
You really thought all those—things—about me?

PHOEBE
(Embarrassed)
I really would prefer we keep this discussion on a professional basis. The girl—

JASON
The girl is you, Phoebe.

PHOEBE
The girl is based upon me. The essence may be me—all right, it is me—but naturally I embellished—

JASON
Why are you stammering?
PHOEBE
Because I'm extremely shy. Now will you take off your clothes and lie down so I can rub you?

(Jason takes off robe and pajama top and reading the open book, lies stomach down on the massage table)

JASON
Listen to this: "He had the lean hard body and supple legs of a tennis professional."

BLANCHE
So?

JASON
So that's my body she's describing.

PHOEBE
Don't be ridiculous, Jason. I didn't use your body.

JASON
(Coldly)
Oh? Why not?

PHOEBE
I wanted those passages to be erotic.

JASON
Well, it certainly sounds like my body—

(She is rubbing alcohol on his back)

—a few years ago. That feels good.

BLANCHE
(Picking up her coat, purse and briefcase)
Well, I'll leave you two alone to iron out your "creative differences." Oh, and Jason, try and be a better person.

(She exits. Phoebe starts to massage Jason's back as he reads)

JASON
(Reading)
"He was gracious, witty and elegant and wore the mantle of success as if it had been custom made." Well, you've certainly captured me there.

PHOEBE
I really wish you wouldn't read that out loud.

JASON
(Reading)
"But since he was stark naked I didn't become aware of these qualities until later. My immediate attention was caught by his—"

(She quickly pounds into his back)

Ooof!

(She continues massaging him and Jason succumbs)

Oh, that's better—oh, that feels good—yes, right there—Oh, yes.

(The door bursts open, Leo jumps into the room, and stands staring at them)

LEO
Ha-ha!!

Ha-ha what?

LEO
(Deadpan)
I was outside the door and I heard these guttural groaning sounds and cries of pleasure. Naturally, I jumped to the conclusion that you were giving him a massage. So I burst in here—and sure enough you are.

(A beat)
So—ha, ha!

What do you want, Leo?

LEO
I have some things to do at the desk.

JASON
Well, we're trying to work. I mean you're not going to bang a typewriter, are you?
I mean, for him to be sympathetic they have to know how he *feels* about the girl. After all, he never seems to return her feelings.

**JASON**

It wasn't that simple.

(A beat)

How about this? Supposing he's a man who believes in tradition—including the tradition of marriage. As soon as he marries he realizes he's made a mistake—but he's a honorable man so he lives with his mistake—the victim of bad timing. He makes the best of the situation.

**PHOEBE**

You mean he wants it both ways?

**JASON**

Look, it wasn't easy for me—him. Selfish, yes—but isn't that human?

**PHOEBE**

Not enough. I mean if he really loves her, why doesn't he tell her?

**JASON**

All right, maybe he's a man who has trouble showing his emotions, who likes his life—especially his emotional life—as tidy as possible. Not an admirable quality—not one he admires in himself, but ingrained in his character.

**PHOEBE**

Then why did he—

**JASON**

I can answer that.

(He sits, still not looking at her)

He had the affair with the actress rather than the girl—*because* she meant nothing to him. I—he thought it would keep the situation—emotionally tidy. If it happened with the girl he knew he couldn't control it—it would have blown the roof off.

(He turns and looks at her)

Do you believe that, Phoebe?
(There is a pause—finally Leo pounds the stapler, startling Jason and Phoebe)

What are you doing skulking back there?

LEO

I'm sorry to have interrupted you.

PHOEBE

Oh, you haven't.

(To Jason)

You don't want to work any more today, do you?

JASON

No, I think we should call it a day.

(He moves to dressing room door, turns)

I feel we accomplished a great deal, don't you?

(He exits. Phoebe starts to fold up the massage table)

LEO

You need a hand with that?

PHOEBE

No, I can do it.

LEO

I'll do it... I'll do it.

(Leo takes table, looks at her)

PHOEBE

What's the matter?

LEO

It's amazing. Within three weeks he's got you back to looking like Cinderella before she went to the ball.

PHOEBE

I'm sorry, Leo. I know these last few weeks must have been very hard for you.

LEO

Just as hard for you.

PHOEBE

Well, I have been a bit distracted.

LEO

Distracted? I feel as if I've been living with a bad waitress.

PHOEBE

What do you mean?

LEO

I've been trying to catch your eye for days.

(She looks at him)

PHOEBE

You've caught it, honey. What's your pleasure?

LEO

When are we going to make love?

PHOEBE

(Flustered)

And I thought you just wanted to pay the check.

LEO

I'm thinking about that, too.

PHOEBE

(Finally)

Leo, I'm sorry, I—I just feel funny being in Jason and Allison's bed.

LEO

(Evenly)

I'm relieved to hear there's a good reason.

PHOEBE

I know it's silly but—there are a lot of memories in this house for me. Look, I've been exhausted lately.

(He doesn't say anything)

Leo, it was your suggestion that we move in here. You had to know I'd be run ragged for a few days.
Yes, I expected all that.

*PHOEBE*

Then why are you so upset?

*LEO*

You never have to ask each other questions.

*(Thrown)*

*PHOEBE*

What?

*LEO*

You read each other’s minds. It’s incredible. You finish each other’s sentences like—like an old married couple.

*PHOEBE*

It’s just an old habit, Leo. We’ve worked together so long that we’re tuned into the same wave length.

*LEO*

It bothers me.

*PHOEBE*

Why?

*LEO*

Because you have to ask me why! For the past fifteen minutes I’ve been watching my wife and a man mentally copulate. I feel like a voyeur!

*PHOEBE*

Leo, you’re exaggerating!

*(Jason, now fully dressed, enters)*

*JASON*

Listen, I’ve been thinking—

*(He stops as he sees Leo and Phoebe staring at one another. There is a tense pause)*

I have the feeling I’ve walked into the middle of a family squabble.
LEO

Well, I’ve decided that this time I’m not going to settle for second. The others I could live with but this time I’d hate myself. And that wouldn’t be fair. I’m a pretty nice guy and I don’t deserve it.

PHOEBE

(Quickly)

I’m almost finished. You see, it’s not too bad getting the consolation prize but being the consolation prize really gets to me. I love you, Phoebe. I probably always will. But—I want my marriage to be a blue ribbon affair. Now I’m not exactly sure what is going on with you two—I’m not even sure you know either—but whatever it is, I think you should have a chance to find out and get it settled once and for all. To do that, you both need some time—and freedom.

(A beat)

That’s about it.

(He looks at them for a moment and then moves to door and picks up his suitcase)

I wish you happiness—one way or the other. I’d like to say you deserve each other—but I’m not sure you do.

(He exits. There is a long, tense pause)

JASON

Well, he’s right about one thing. He is a pretty nice guy.

PHOEBE

The hell he is.

(Jason looks at her in great surprise)

JASON

What?

PHOEBE

Who does he think he is handing me around from man to man like I’m an old football. Don’t I have any say in my future?

JASON

Is that why you’re angry?
JASON

It's a start. Phoebe.

(She stops. He looks at her for a moment)

I missed the moment again, didn't I?

(He stands)

You were right about my lacking spontaneity—one part of me standing back—always thinking of the effective gesture. And I did it again.

PHOEBE

Oh?

JASON

When you were crying I should have taken you in my arms and comforted you. I wanted to—but I was too busy considering whether the staging was right—and the moment passed.

(Incredulously)

Do you know what I said? "I'll clear out of your way and wait over here." I actually said that. Do you know that I almost didn't give you my handkerchief because it seemed cliché? What sort of man would do that?

(She doesn't answer. He comes out from behind the desk)

Well, I don't know if the moment is right or not but—

(He marches over to her, takes her in his arms and kisses her. They break, embarrassed)

PHOEBE

Well, I suppose some decisions have to be reached.

JASON

I suppose they do.

PHOEBE

What would you like for dinner?

JASON

Could we begin with something easier?
Scene 3

TIME: The next morning.

AT RISE: Jason and Phoebe are sharing the sofa bed. Jason is asleep, Phoebe, in her robe, is looking lovingly at him. Jason wakes and turns to her.

PHOEBE

(Finally)
So—how do you like your eggs?
(He turns to look at her)

JASON

You know how I like them.

PHOEBE

Scrambled?
(He nods. A small pause)
How did you sleep?

JASON

Fine.
(A beat)
How about you?

PHOEBE

Very well, thank you.
JASON

Good.

PHOEBE

Well—I’ll get breakfast started.

(She kisses him lightly, gets out of bed, picks up her clothes and moves to door)

JASON

You need any help?

PHOEBE

No, I can manage, thanks.

JASON

I’ll tidy up the room.

PHOEBE

Good.

(She smiles a trifle too brightly)

Well—

(She rather awkwardly blows him a kiss and exits. Jason gets out of bed, calmly puts on his trousers and shirt. He is in the middle of buttoning up his shirt when he lets out a low, anguished moan)

JASON

That—was—the—most—embarrassing experience of my life!!

(He goes into the same maniacal dance we saw him execute in the first scene, jerkily moving around the room suffused with a combination of frustration and embarrassment)

God, that was—awful! Absolutely, utterly—horrendous! Humiliating! The most humili—

(He stops as he sees Phoebe who has reentered and is staring at him. There is a pause)

I really wish you wouldn’t keep doing that.

PHOEBE

(Finally)

There’s a hippopotamus in the room, isn’t there?

JASON

(Uncomfortably)

Maybe if we ignore it, it’ll go away.

PHOEBE

I don’t think so.

(He looks at her)

JASON, I think we should discuss it openly and frankly.

JASON

What?

PHOEBE

Our—“you know” life.

JASON

Well, that’s certainly being frank.

(She clears her throat)

PHOEBE

(Firmly)

All right. Jason, I don’t want you to feel bad because I didn’t have an orgasm.

(He looks at her for a moment)

JASON

Well, I don’t want you to feel bad because I didn’t have one either.

(She doesn’t smile)

And as your cousin would say—ha-ha.

PHOEBE

Was it because of something I did—or didn’t do?

JASON

(Uncomfortably)

Of course not. Why would you think that?

PHOEBE

Sometimes I get—overexcited.
(Somewhat baffled, he looks at her. She nervously clears her throat.)

I mean I tend to have trouble accepting—the gift of sensuality and I get so anxious to please I come off as—an overeager puppy dog. You know, all wet tongue and wagging tail.

JASON

Sounds pretty good to me. Oh, Phoebe, it’s not you—

(Awkwardly)

Look, I think we’re overreacting to the whole—situation.

(He moves away to resume dressing)

It—it was fine.

PHOEBE

Fine?

PHOEBE

Fine.

JASON

(Quietly)

Jason, after fourteen years and two wrecked marriages, “fine” doesn’t quite make it.

JASON

(Awkwardly—gently)

There was a lot of pressure on us to—succeed.

(Shell looks at him for a moment)

PHOEBE

(Briskly)

All right, let’s try and put that in perspective first.

(Shell pushes sofa bed in during following)

On a scale of ten would you say we’re a five?

JASON

I can see why you were so popular as a teacher. You’re an easy grader.

PHOEBE

Oh, my God.

JASON

What?

PHOEBE

I thought it was just me. I expected you to reassure me, tell me that it wasn’t important.

JASON

I did.

PHOEBE

I didn’t believe you.

JASON

I’m sorry, kid.

PHOEBE

(Finally)

It’s funny, isn’t it?

JASON

What?

PHOEBE

Us. Twelve years of pent-up passion and it didn’t end with a bang—but with a whimper.

JASON

And very few of them.

(Gently)

We’re about fourteen years out of sync, kid.

PHOEBE

Our timing’s that bad?

JASON

We should have become lovers when we met—but that wasn’t possible. So, over the years, I lived through your cold sores and you suffered through my post nasal drip. I held your head when you threw up on opening nights and you gave me sponge baths when I was sick. In short, my friend—we became friends.

PHOEBE

You don’t think it’s possible to have a good sex life with a friend?
JASON
I don't know. You're the first friend I've been to bed with.

PHOEBE
(Finally)
You know, after everything that’s happened, after everything we've been through—people expect us to get married.

JASON
To hell with them. Let 'em find their own happy ending. That's the first time I've seen you actually cry at one of my jokes.

PHOEBE
(Tearfully)
It's just that we seem to have made such a mess of everything.

(We hear the front doorbell ring)

JASON
We're not the only people in the world with bad timing.
(He gets up, Phoebe moves to the door, turns)

PHOEBE
What are we going to do, Jason?

(They are looking at one another uncertainly as the doorbell rings again. She exits. Jason folds the sofa bed. After a moment Leo enters. The two men look at one another)

LEO
(Finally)
So how's it going?

JASON
Fine.

LEO
Phoebe's getting the rest of my stuff.

JASON
Where are you off to this time?

LEO
Spain. I thought I'd take some time off to write a book.

JASON
Why not? Everyone else is. Inside story stuff?

LEO
Fiction. Phoebe taught me a lot.

JASON
Do you regret having married her, Leo?

LEO
Of course not.

JASON
Do you mind if I ask you a personal question?

LEO
(Dryly)
I look on you as practically a member of the family.

JASON
How was your sex life?

LEO
(Finally)
You mean did the earth move?

JASON
Actually, I'd like you to be more specific than that.

LEO
Shouldn't we go into the locker room for this discussion?

JASON
Look, I'm not enjoying the tenor of this conversation, either. I wouldn't ask if it weren't important.

(Leo takes out his notebook and starts to write)

What are you writing?

LEO
Specifics. I thought if I put it in a questionnaire form it would be easier for you to refer to.

JASON
Sometimes I find your dry humor irritating.
LEO

(Still writing)
Did it ever occur to you that I might be embarrassed, too? Don’t let these clothes fool you. I’m not as sophisticated as I look.

(Leo tears the page out of the notebook and hands it to Jason)

JASON

You’re sure you’re not exaggerating?

LEO

(A beat)
I’m only working from memory, of course.

(Caustically)
It’s obviously extremely vivid.

LEO

Yes.

(The two men are staring at one another as Phoebe, now dressed, enters. There is an awkward moment)

PHOEBE

(Awkwardly)
So—what have you two been talking about?

LEO

Phoebe, you want to come to Spain with me?

PHOEBE

(Finally—shakily)
You think I just bounce from bed to bed like Nell Gwyn?

LEO

I think it’s about time you grew up.

PHOEBE

How do I do that?

LEO

Come with me. Nothing’s been lost, Phoebe.

PHOEBE

Oh?

(He shrugs)

LEO

Everybody has someone in their past they wonder about. All very romantic. But the very notion of romantic love demands that it be unrequited. So requited isn’t what it’s supposed to be. Things didn’t turn out the way you’d planned. It happens to all of us.

JASON

(Agitated)
Look, if you’ve finished playing “the old philosopher.” Aren’t you assuming a lot? How can you possibly know it didn’t turn out as planned?

LEO

(Losing his temper)
Because there’s no way it could! Nothing could have lived up to the sort of expectations you both had!

JASON

(Rising)
Did it ever occur to you that we might just be in love with each other?

LEO

Oh, come off it! You’re not in love with each other! You’re in love with the magic of make believe!

JASON

Then why the hell did you leave us alone together?

(There is a slight pause as Leo regains control)

LEO

There was a good reason for that. Stupidity. It wasn’t until last night that I realized how stupid I’d been. You had me playing a role—the noble husband who steps aside so that his wife can find “true romantic fulfillment.” I mean what a bullshit thing to do!
JASON
(Mildly)
I thought it was rather a nice touch myself.

LEO
Is that supposed to be funny?

JASON
Well, I'm sorry if I'm not up to my usual form. You see I have this feeling I'm about to see a fourteen year old dream of mine destroyed. I've had it a long time! I've grown attached to it!

LEO
Yes, well I'm a reporter. I deal in the here and now.

(To Phoebe)
I'm not in love with the way you were fourteen years ago—or five years ago. I love the woman you are now—today. I want you exactly as you are.

(A pause)
Is it so hard to choose between us, Phoebe?

PHOEBE
(Shakily)
You're looking at a girl who couldn't even get a date on Saturday night. A very conventional girl.

LEO
Forget about conventions. Look, both Jason and I want what is best for you, but we can't decide that for you. Whatever you decide—we'll accept. For once in your life be selfish.

(She looks over at Jason)

JASON
(Finally—somewhat harshly)
He's right.

PHOEBE
(Hurt)
Don't you love me?

(He looks at her for a moment)

PHOEBE
(Gently)
Phoebe, do you remember *Innocent Deception*? On paper everything seemed perfect but for some reason it just didn't work. The chemistry wasn't there. It should have worked, we wanted it to work but—it just didn't.

PHOEBE
(Tightly)
So much for happy endings.

JASON
Welcome to real life, kid. Take care of her, Leo.

(He moves away)

LEO
I'll get your things and grab a cab.

(Leo exits)

PHOEBE
If I walk out of that door it won't solve all our problems, you know. All our lives—somehow we'll always be—connected.

(He turns to look at her)

JASON
Phoebe, you have a nasty little romantic streak in you that pops out at the slightest provocation.

PHOEBE
Look who's talking.

(A beat)
And there's not an orchestra pit within miles.

JASON
Before you go there is something that should be said.

(A beat)
I love you, Phoebe. I always have. And when you came back and it seemed you didn't feel the same way about me—I still loved you. I suppose that was the clincher. I'm a very selfish man and the fact that I could love someone without getting anything in return—

(A slight shrug)
Then when I woke up this morning—after everything had not been what we'd both wanted—you were still my best friend. I find that—extraordinary.

PHOEBE

(Finally)
So do I.
(Phoebe exits. Jason stands for a moment regarding the room. He moves up to the desk and looks again around the room. In the distance we hear the front door slam. Jason slumps over his desk chair. There is a pause and then Phoebe reenters)

PHOEBE
You're miscast as Sydney Carton you know.

JASON
Oh, I don't know. You're back, aren't you?

PHOEBE
Aren't you going to ask what happened?
(He turns to face her)

JASON
I know what happened. Friendship, Lust o. Right?

PHOEBE
Well, I wouldn't put it quite that way.

JASON
How would you put it?

PHOEBE
I never quite got the hang of real life.

JASON
That's why you came back?

PHOEBE
No. Where else would I find someone as hopelessly outdated as I am?

(They smile at one another for a moment)

You working on the last scene?

JASON
Just doodling.

(She moves into the room)

PHOEBE
(Briskly)
All right. This couple have gone through the equivalent of a marriage. They finally get together only to discover the only thing they have left is—what?

JASON
A mutual lack of passion.

PHOEBE
(Quickly)
I'm very passionate about you!

JASON
(Gently)
And I about you.
(They look at one another for a moment)

We seem to be off the subject. They're left with—what?

PHOEBE
A mutuality of interests. They go to movies, museums, ball games together. They grow old together—good companions. It's sweet.

JASON
It's depressing.

PHOEBE
It could be romantic—in a funny way.

JASON
Funny is good.
(Jason crosses and sits on the sofa)
I've been thinking. Given the basic talent—and I'm sure they both have that—sex can be learned. I mean you weren't a very good writer when you came to me but, with a little instruction, look how well you turned out.

**PHOEBE**

If I run I could still catch Leo.

**JASON**

It would give them a common interest. Like learning a common language.

**PHOEBE**

Are you through?

**JASON**

I think so.

(Phoebe sits on sofa, taking Jason's feet on her lap)

**PHOEBE**

None of that is important. The important thing is friendship. I mean anyone can find a good sex partner. You found it with Allison. I found it with Leo.

(Shes is now stroking his leg under his trouser cuffs, too absorbed with what she is saying to realize the effect it is having on Jason)

But a true, loving friendship between a man and a woman where you accept one another's faults and still like the other—that's rare and valuable. That's what's important.

**JASON**

I agree.

**PHOEBE**

(Thoughtfully)

Of course it would be nice to have sex too.

**JASON**

Come over here, Phoebe.

**PHOEBE**

Shall we keep working?

**JASON**

We'll improvise.

(She moves to lie down beside him, her head on his chest)

**PHOEBE**

I thought you hated improvisation.

**JASON**

I'm willing to learn.

(Shes is now moving into his arms)

It's not going to work with your elbow in my rib cage.

**PHOEBE**

Well, if you'd hold your head—

**JASON**

No—see, if you do that I can't breathe.

**PHOEBE**

No wonder this sort of thing always happens onstage.

**JASON**

It doesn't have to be a ballet, Phoebe. Just . . .

**PHOEBE**

Wait a minute—I have a better idea.

(Shes moves on top of Jason)

**JASON**

You really want to do it that way?

**PHOEBE**

Well, I think we should at least try it.

**JASON**

Yes, but it cuts off all circulation to my—knees!

(The curtain starts to fall)

**PHOEBE**

Jason, stop talking and—collaborate.

(The CURTAIN FALLS)

**THE END**